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GEORGE MEREDITH

BEAUCHAMP'S CAREER

VOL. II

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1910

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BURSLEDON ON THE HAMBLE RIVER NEAR SOUTHAMPTON, THE SCENE OF NEVIL BEAUCHAMP'S DEATH . . . . . *Frontispiece*

From a photograph taken by Walter Bonington in 1910.

THE OLD BRIDGE AT BURSLEDON . *Facing page* 150

From a photograph taken by Walter Bonington in 1910.

BEAUCHAMP'S CAREER

VOL. II

CHAPTER XXIX

THE EPISTLE OF DR. SHRAPNEL TO COMMANDER BEAUCHAMP

Before we give ear to the recital of Dr. Shrapnel's letter to his pupil in politics by the mouth of Captain Baskelett, it is necessary to defend this gentleman, as he would handsomely have defended himself, from the charge that he entertained ultimate designs in regard to the really abominable scrawl, which was like a child's drawing of ocean with here and there a sail capsized, and excited his disgust almost as much as did the contents his great indignation. He was prepared to read it, and stood blown out for the task, but it was temporarily too much for him. 'My dear Colonel, look at it, I entreat you,' he said, handing the letter for exhibition, after fixing his eye-glass, and dropping it in repulsion. The common sentiment of mankind is offended by heterodoxy in mean attire; for there we see the self-convicted villain—the criminal caught in the act; we try it and convict it by instinct without the ceremony of a jury; and so thoroughly aware of our promptitude in this respect has our arch-enemy become since his mediæval disgraces that his particular advice to his followers is now to scrupulously copy the world in externals; never to appear poorly clothed, nor to impart deceptive communications in bad handwriting. We can tell black from white, and our sagacity has taught him a lesson.

Colonel Halkett glanced at the detestable penmanship. Lord Palmet did the same, and cried, 'Why, it 's worse than mine!'

Cecilia had protested against the reading of the letter, and she declined to look at the writing. She was entreated, adjured to look, in Captain Baskelett's peculiarly pursuing fashion; a 'nay, but you shall,' that she had been subjected to previously, and would have consented to run like a schoolgirl to escape from.

To resume the defence of him: he was a man incapable of forming plots, because his head would not hold them. He was an impulsive man, who could impale a character of either sex by narrating fables touching persons of whom he thought lightly, and that being done he was devoid of malice, unless by chance his feelings or his interests were so aggrieved that his original haphazard impulse was bent to embrace new circumstances and be the parent of a line of successive impulses, in the main resembling an extremely far-sighted plot, whereat he gazed back with fondness, all the while protesting sincerely his perfect innocence of anything of the kind. Circumstances will often interwind with the moods of simply irritated men. In the present instance he could just perceive what might immediately come of his reading out of this atrocious epistle wherein Nevil Beauchamp was displayed the dangling puppet of a mountebank wire-puller, infidel, agitator, leveller, and scoundrel. Cognizant of Mr. Romfrey's overtures to Colonel Halkett, he traced them to that scheming woman in the house at Steynham, and he was of opinion that it was a friendly and good thing to do to let the old colonel and Cissy Halkett know Mr. Nevil through a bit of his correspondence. This, then, was a matter of business and duty that furnished an excuse for his going out of his way to call at Mount Laurels on the old familiar footing, so as not to alarm the heiress.

A warrior accustomed to wear the burnished breastplates between London and Windsor has, we know, more

need to withstand than to discharge the shafts of amorous passion; he is indeed, as an object of beauty, notoriously compelled to be of the fair sex in his tactics, and must practise the arts and whims of nymphs to preserve himself: and no doubt it was the case with the famous Captain Baskelett, in whose mind sweet ladies held the place that the pensive politician gives to the masses, dreadful in their hatred, almost as dreadful in their affection. But an heiress is a distinct species among women; he hungered for the heiress; his elevation to Parliament made him regard her as both the ornament and the prop of his position; and it should be added that his pride, all the habits of thought of a conqueror of women, had been shocked by that stupefying rejection of him, which Cecilia had intimated to her father with the mere lowering of her eyelids. Conceive the highest bidder at an auction hearing the article announce that it will not have *him*! Captain Baskelett talked of it everywhere for a month or so:—the girl could not know her own mind, for she suited him exactly! and he requested the world to partake of his astonishment. Chronicles of the season in London informed him that he was not the only fellow to whom the gates were shut. She could hardly be thinking of Nevil? However, let the epistle be read. 'Now for the Shrapnel shot,' he nodded finally to Colonel Halkett, expanded his bosom, or natural cuirass, as beforementioned, and was vocable above the common pitch:—

'"My brave Beauchamp,—On with your mission, and never a summing of results in hand, nor thirst for *prospects*, nor counting upon harvests; for seed sown in faith day by day is the nightly harvest of the soul, and with the soul we work. With the soul we see."'

Captain Baskelett intervened: 'Ahem! I beg to observe that this delectable rubbish is underlined by

old Nevil's pencil.' He promised to do a little roaring whenever it occurred, and continued with ghastly false accentuation, an intermittent sprightliness and depression of tone in the wrong places.

'"The soul," et cætera. Here we are! "Desires to realize our gains are akin to the passion of usury; these are tricks of the usurer to grasp his gold in act and imagination. Have none of them. Work at the people!" —*At* them, remark!—"Moveless do they seem to you? Why, so is the earth to the sowing husbandman, and though we cannot forecast a reaping season, we have in history durable testification that our seasons come in the souls of men, yea, as a planet that we have set in motion, and faster and faster are we spinning it, and firmer and firmer shall we set it to regularity of revolution. *That means life!*"—Shrapnel roars: you will have Nevil in a minute.—"Recognize that now we have bare life; at best for the bulk of men the Saurian lizard's broad back soaking and roasting in primeval slime; or say, in the so-called teachers of men, as much of life as pricks the frog in March to stir and yawn, and up on a flaccid leap that rolls him over some three inches nearer to the ditchwater besought by his instinct."

'I ask you, did you ever hear? The flaccid frog! But on we go.

'"Professors, prophets, masters, each hitherto has had his creed and system to offer, good mayhap for the term; and each has put it forth for the truth everlasting, to drive the dagger to the heart of time, and put the axe to human growth!—that one circle of wisdom issuing of the experience and needs of their day, should act the despot over all other circles for ever!—so where at first light shone to light the yawning frog to his wet ditch, there, with the necessitated revolution of men's minds in the course of ages, *darkness radiates*."

'That 's old Nevil. Upon my honour, I haven't a notion of what it all means, and I don't believe the old rascal Shrapnel has himself. And pray be patient, my dear colonel. You will find him practical presently. I 'll skip, if you tell me to. Darkness radiates, does it!

'"The creed that rose in heaven sets below; and where we had an angel we have claw-feet and fangs. Ask how that is! The creed is much what it was when the followers diverged it from the Founder. But humanity is not *where* it was when that creed was food and guidance. Creeds will not die not fighting. We cannot root them up out of us without blood."

'He threatens blood!—"Ours, my Beauchamp, is the belief that humanity advances beyond the limits of creeds, is to be tied to none. We reverence the Master in his teachings; we behold the limits of him in his creed—and that is not his work. We truly are his disciples, who see how far it was in him to do service; not they that made of his creed a strait-jacket for humanity. So, in our prayers we dedicate the world to God, not calling him great for a title, no—showing him we know him great in a limitless world, lord of a truth we tend to, have not grasped. I say Prayer is good. I counsel it to you again and again: in joy, in sickness of heart. The infidel will not pray; the creed-slave prays to the image in his box."'

'I 've had enough!' Colonel Halkett ejaculated.

'"We,"' Captain Baskelett put out his hand for silence with an ineffable look of entreaty, for here was Shrapnel's hypocrisy in full bloom: '"we make prayer a part of us, praying for no gifts, no interventions; through the faith in prayer opening the soul to the undiscerned. And take this, my Beauchamp, for the good in prayer, that it makes us repose on the unknown with confidence, makes us flexible to change, makes us ready for revolution—for

life, then! He who has the fountain of prayer in him will not complain of hazards. Prayer is the recognition of laws; the soul's exercise and source of strength; its thread of conjunction with them. Prayer for an object is the cajolery of an idol; the resource of superstition. There you misread it, Beauchamp. We that fight the living world must have the universal for succour of the truth in it. Cast forth the soul in prayer, you meet the effluence of the outer truth, you join with the creative elements giving breath to you; and that crust of habit which is the soul's tomb; and custom, the soul's tyrant; and pride, our volcano-peak that sinks us in a crater; and fear, which plucks the feathers from the wings of the soul and sits it naked and shivering in a vault, where the passing of a common hodman's foot above sounds like the king of terrors coming,—you are free of them, you live in the day and for the future, by this exercise and discipline of the soul's faith. Me it keeps young everlastingly, like the fountain of . . .'"

'I say I cannot sit and hear any more of it!' exclaimed the colonel, chafing out of patience.

Lord Palmet said to Miss Halkett: 'Isn't it like what we used to remember of a sermon?'

Cecilia waited for her father to break away, but Captain Baskelett had undertaken to skip, and was murmuring in sing-song some of the phrases that warned him off: '"History—Bible of Humanity; . . . Permanency—enthusiast's dream—despot's aim—clutch of dead men's fingers in live flesh . . . Man animal; man angel; man rooted; man winged": . . . Really, all this is too bad. Ah! here we are: "At them with outspeaking, Beauchamp!" Here we are, colonel, and you will tell me whether you think it treasonable or not. "At them," et cætera: "We have signed no convention to respect their"—he speaks of Englishmen, Colonel Halkett—

"their passive idolatries; a people with whom a mute conformity is as good as worship, but a word of dissent holds you up to execration; and only for the freedom won in foregone days their hate would be active. *As we have them in their present stage,*"—old Nevil's mark—"*We* are not parties to the tacit agreement to fill our mouths and shut our eyes. We speak because it is better they be roused to lapidate us than soused in their sty, with none to let them hear they live like swine, craving only not to be disturbed at the trough. The religion of this vast English middle-class ruling the land is Comfort. It is their central thought; their idea of necessity; their sole aim. Whatsoever ministers to Comfort, seems to belong to it, pretends to support it, they yield their passive worship to. Whatsoever alarms it they join to crush. There you get at their point of unity. They will pay for the security of Comfort, calling it national worship, or national defence, if too much money is not subtracted from the means of individual comfort: if too much foresight is not demanded for the comfort of their brains. Have at them there. Speak. Moveless as you find them, they are not yet all gross clay, and I say again, the true word spoken has its chance of somewhere alighting and striking root. Look not to that. Seeds perish in nature; good men fail. Look to the truth in you, and deliver it, with no afterthought of hope, for hope is dogged by dread; we give our courage as hostage for the fulfilment of what we hope. Meditate on that transaction. Hope is for boys and girls, to whom nature is kind. For men to hope is to tremble. Let prayer—the soul's overflow, the heart's resignation—supplant it . . ."

'Pardon, colonel; I forgot to roar, but old Nevil marks all down that page for encomium,' said Captain Baskelett. 'Oh! here we are. English loyalty is the subject. Now, pray attend to this, colonel. Shrapnel communicates to

Beauchamp that if ten Beauchamps were spouting over the country without intermission he might condescend to hope. So on—to British loyalty. We are, so long as our sovereigns are well-conducted persons, and we cannot unseat them—observe; he is eminently explicit, the old traitor!—we are to submit to the outward forms of respect, but we are frankly to say we are Republicans; he has the impudence to swear that England is a Republican country, and calls our thoroughgoing loyalty —yours and mine, colonel—disloyalty. Hark: "Where kings lead, it is to be supposed they are wanted. Service is the noble office on earth, and where kings do service let them take the first honours of the State: but"—hark at this—"the English middle-class, which has absorbed the upper, and despises, when it is not quaking before it, the lower, will have nothing above it but a ricketty ornament like that you see on a confectioner's twelfth-cake."'

'The man deserves hanging!' said Colonel Halkett.

'Further, my dear colonel, and Nevil marks it pretty much throughout: "This loyalty smacks of a terrible perfidy. Pass the lords and squires; they are old trees, old foundations, or joined to them, whether old or new; they naturally apprehend dislocation when a wind blows, a river rises, or a man speaks;—that comes of age or aping age: their hearts are in their holdings! For the loyalty of the rest of the land, it is the shopkeeper's loyalty, which is to be computed by the exact annual sum of his net profits. It is now at high tide. It will last with the prosperity of our commerce."—The insolent old vagabond!—"Let commercial disasters come on us, and what of the loyalty now paying its hundreds of thousands, and howling down questioners! In a day of bankruptcies, how much would you bid for the loyalty of a class shivering under deprivation of luxuries, with

its God Comfort beggared? Ay, my Beauchamp,"—the most offensive thing to me is that "my Beauchamp," but old Nevil has evidently given himself up hand and foot to this ruffian—"ay, when you reflect that fear of the so-called rabble, *i.e.* the people, the unmoneyed class, which knows not Comfort, tastes not of luxuries, is the main component of their noisy frigid loyalty, and that the people are not with them but against, and yet that the people might be won by visible forthright kingly service to a loyalty outdoing theirs as the sun the moon; ay, that the people verily thirst to love and reverence; and *that their love is the only love worth having*, because it is disinterested love, and endures, and takes heat in adversity,—reflect on it and wonder at the inversion of things! So with a Church. It lives if it is at home with the poor. In the arms of enriched shopkeepers it rots, goes to decay in vestments—vestments! flakes of mummy-wraps for it! or else they use it for one of their political truncheons—to awe the ignorant masses: I quote them. So. Not much ahead of ancient Egyptians in spirituality or in priestcraft! They call it statesmanship. O for a word for it! Let Palsy and Cunning go to form a word. *Deadmanship*, I call it."—To quote my uncle the baron, this is lunatic dribble!—"Parsons and princes are happy with the homage of this huge passive fleshpot class. It is enough for them. Why not? The taxes are paid and the tithes. Whilst commercial prosperity lasts!"'

Colonel Halkett threw his arms aloft.

'"Meanwhile, note this: the people are the Power to come. Oppressed, unprotected, abandoned; left to the ebb and flow of the tides of the market, now taken on to work, now cast off to starve, committed to the shifting laws of demand and supply, slaves of Capital—the whited name for old accursed Mammon: and of all the ranked

and black-uniformed host no pastor to come out of the association of shepherds, and proclaim before heaven and man the primary claim of their cause;—they are, I say, the power, worth the seduction of by another Power not mighty in England now: and likely in time to set up yet another Power not existing in England now. What if a passive comfortable clergy hand them over to men on the models of Irish pastors, who will succour, console, enfold, champion them? what if, when they have learnt to use their majority, sick of deceptions and the endless pulling of interests, they raise ONE representative to force the current of action with an authority as little fictitious as their preponderance of numbers? The despot and the priest! There I see *our* danger, Beauchamp. You and I and some dozen labour to tie and knot them to manliness. We are few; they are many and weak. Rome offers them real comfort in return for their mites in coin, and—poor souls! mites in conscience, many of them. A Tyrant offers them to be directly their friend. Ask, Beauchamp, why they should not have comfort for pay as well as the big round—"' Captain Baskelett stopped and laid the letter out for Colonel Halkett to read an unmentionable word, shamelessly marked by Nevil's pencil—"*belly-class!*" Ask, too, whether the comfort they wish for is not approaching divine compared with the stagnant fleshliness of that fat shopkeeper's Comfort.

'"Warn the people of this. Ay, warn the clergy. It is not only the poor that are caught by ranters. Endeavour to make those accommodating shepherds understand that they stand a chance of losing *rich* as well as poor! It should awaken them. The helpless poor and the uneasy rich are alike open to the seductions of Romish priests and intoxicated ranters. I say so it will be if that band of forty thousand go on slumbering and nodding.

They walk in a dream. The flesh *is* a dream. The soul only is life."

'Now for you, colonel.

'"No extension of the army—no! A thousand times no. Let India go, then! Good for India that we hold India? Ay, good: but not at such a cost as an extra tax, or compulsory service of our working man. If India is to be held for the good of India, throw open India to the civilized nations, that they help us in a task that overstrains us. At present India means utter perversion of the policy of England. Adrift India! rather than England red-coated. We dissent, Beauchamp! For by-and-by."

'That is,' Captain Baskelett explained, 'by-and-by Shrapnel will have old Nevil fast enough.'

'Is there more of it?' said Colonel Halkett, flapping his forehead for coolness.

'The impudence of this dog in presuming to talk about India!—eh, colonel? Only a paragraph or two more: I skip a lot. . . . Ah! here we are.' Captain Baskelett read to himself and laughed in derision: 'He calls our Constitution a compact unsigned by the larger number involved in it. What 's this? "A band of dealers in *fleshpottery*." Do you detect a gleam of sense? He underscores it. Then he comes to this': Captain Baskelett requested Colonel Halkett to read for himself: 'The stench of the trail of Ego in our History.'

The colonel perused it with an unsavoury expression of his features, and jumped up.

'Oddly, Mr. Romfrey thought this rather clever,' said Captain Baskelett, and read rapidly: '"Trace the course of Ego for them: first the king who conquers and can govern. In his egoism he dubs him holy; his family is of a selected blood; he makes the crown hereditary—Ego. Son by son the shame of egoism increases; valour

abates; hereditary Crown, no hereditary qualities. The Barons rise. They in turn hold sway, and for their order —Ego. The traders overturn them: each class rides the classes under it while it can. It is ego—ego, the fountain cry, origin, sole source of war! Then death to ego, I say! If those traders had ruled for other than ego, power might have rested with them on broad basis enough to carry us forward for centuries. The workmen have ever been too anxious *to be ruled.* Now comes on the workman's era. Numbers win in the end: proof of small wisdom in the world. Anyhow, with numbers there is rough nature's wisdom and justice. With numbers ego is inter-dependent and dispersed; it is universalized. Yet these may require correctives. If so, they will have it in a series of despots and revolutions that toss, mix, and bind the classes together: despots, revolutions; *panting alternations of the quickened heart of humanity*": marked by our friend Nevil in notes of admiration.'

'Mad as the writer,' groaned Colonel Halkett. 'Never in my life have I heard such stuff.'

'Stay, colonel; here 's Shrapnel defending Morality and Society,' said Captain Baskelett.

Colonel Halkett vowed he was under no penal law to listen, and would not; but Captain Baskelett persuaded him: 'Yes, here it is: I give you my word. Apparently old Nevil has been standing up for every man's right to run away with . . . Yes, really! I give you my word; and here we have Shrapnel insisting on respect for the marriage laws. Do hear this; here it is in black and white:—"Society is our one tangible gain, our one roofing and flooring in a world of most uncertain structures built on morasses. Toward the laws that support it men hopeful of progress give their adhesion. If it is martyrdom, what then? Let the martyrdom be. Contumacy is animalism. And attend to me," says Shrapnel,

"the truer the love the readier for sacrifice! A thousand times yes. Rebellion against Society, and advocacy of Humanity, run counter. Tell me Society is the whited sepulchre, that it is blotched, hideous, hollow: and I say, add not another disfigurement to it; add to the purification of it. And you, if you answer, what can only one? I say that is the animal's answer, and applies also to politics, where the question, *what can one*? put in the relapsing tone, shows the country decaying in the individual. Society is the protection of the weaker, therefore a shield of women, who are our temple of civilization, to be kept sacred; and he that loves a woman will assuredly esteem and pity her sex, and not drag her down for another example of their frailty. Fight this out within you—!" But you are right, colonel; we have had sufficient. I shall be getting a democratic orator's twang, or a crazy parson's, if I go on much further. He covers thirty-two pages of letter-paper. The conclusion is:—"Jenny sends you her compliments, respects, and best wishes, and hopes she may see you before she goes to her friend Clara Sherwin and the General."'

'Sherwin? Why, General Sherwin's a perfect gentleman,' Colonel Halkett interjected; and Lord Palmet caught the other name: 'Jenny? That 's Miss Denham, Jenny Denham; an amazingly pretty girl: beautiful thick brown hair, real hazel eyes, and walks like a yacht before the wind.'

'Perhaps, colonel, *Jenny* accounts for the defence of society,' said Captain Baskelett. 'I have no doubt Shrapnel has a scheme for Jenny. The old communist and socialist!' He folded up the letter: 'A curious composition, is it not, Miss Halkett?'

Cecilia was thinking that he tempted her to be the apologist of even such a letter.

'One likes to know the worst, and what 's possible,' said the colonel.

After Captain Baskelett had gone, Colonel Halkett persisted in talking of the letter, and would have impressed on his daughter that the person to whom the letter was addressed must be partly responsible for the contents of it. Cecilia put on the argumentative air of a Court of Equity to discuss the point with him.

'Then you defend that letter?' he cried.

Oh, no: she did not defend the letter; she thought it wicked and senseless. 'But,' said she, 'the superior strength of men to women seems to me to come from their examining all subjects, shrinking from none. At least, I should not condemn Nevil on account of his correspondence.'

'We shall see,' said her father, sighing rather heavily. 'I must have a talk with Mr. Romfrey about that letter.'

CHAPTER XXX

THE BAITING OF DR. SHRAPNEL

Captain Baskelett went down from Mount Laurels to Bevisham to arrange for the giving of a dinner to certain of his chief supporters in the borough, that they might know he was not obliged literally to sit in Parliament in order to pay a close attention to their affairs. He had not distinguished himself by a speech during the session, but he had stored a political precept or two in his memory, and, as he told Lord Palmet, he thought a dinner was due to his villains. 'The way to manage your Englishman, Palmet, is to dine him.' As the dinner would decidedly be dull, he insisted on having Lord Palmet's company.

They crossed over to the yachting island, where portions of the letter of Commander Beauchamp's correspondent were read at the Club, under the verandah, and the question put, whether a man who held those opinions had a right to wear his uniform.

The letter was transmitted to Steynham in time to be consigned to the pocket-book before Beauchamp arrived there on one of his rare visits. Mr. Romfrey handed him the pocket-book with the frank declaration that he had read Shrapnel's letter. 'All is fair in war, sir!' Beauchamp quoted him ambiguously.

The thieves had amused Mr. Romfrey by their scrupulous honesty in returning what was useless to them, while reserving the coat: but subsequently seeing the advertized reward, they had written to claim it; and, according to Rosamund Culling, he had been so tickled that he had deigned to reply to them, very briefly, but very comically.

Speaking of the matter with her, Beauchamp said (so greatly was he infatuated with the dangerous man) that the reading of a letter of Dr. Shrapnel's could do nothing but good to any reflecting human creature: he admitted that as the lost pocket-book was addressed to Mr. Romfrey, it might have been by mistake that he had opened it, and read the topmost letter lying open. But he pressed Rosamund to say whether that one only had been read.

'Only Dr. Shrapnel's letter,' Rosamund affirmed. 'The letter from Normandy was untouched by him.'

'Untouched by anybody?'

'Unopened, Nevil. You look incredulous.'

'Not if I have your word, ma'am.'

He glanced somewhat contemptuously at his uncle Everard's anachronistic notions of what was fair in war.

To prove to him Mr. Romfrey's affectionate interest in his fortunes, Rosamund mentioned the overtures which

had been made to Colonel Halkett for a nuptial alliance between the two houses; and she said: 'Your uncle Everard was completely won by your manly way of taking his opposition to you in Bevisham. He pays for Captain Baskelett, but you and your fortunes are nearest his heart, Nevil.'

Beauchamp hung silent. His first remark was, 'Yes, I want money. I must have money.' By degrees he seemed to warm to some sense of gratitude. 'It was kind of the baron,' he said.

'He has a great affection for you, Nevil, though you know he spares no one who chooses to be antagonistic. All that is over. But do you not second him, Nevil? You admire her? You are not adverse?'

Beauchamp signified the horrid intermixture of yes and no, frowned in pain of mind, and walked up and down. 'There 's no living woman I admire so much.'

'She has refused the highest matches.'

'I hold her in every way incomparable.'

'She tries to understand your political ideas, if she cannot quite sympathize with them, Nevil. And consider how hard it is for a young English lady, bred in refinement, to understand such things.'

'Yes,' Beauchamp nodded; yes. Well, more 's the pity for me!'

'Ah! Nevil, that fatal Renée!'

'Ma'am, I acquit you of any suspicion of your having read her letter in this pocket-book. She wishes me to marry. You would have seen it written here. She wishes it.'

'Fly, clipped wing!' murmured Rosamund, and purposely sent a buzz into her ears to shut out his extravagant talk of Renée's friendly wishes.

'How is it you women will not believe in the sincerity of a woman!' he exclaimed.

'Nevil, I am not alluding to the damage done to your election.'

'To my candidature, ma'am. You mean those rumours, those lies of the enemy. Tell me how I could suppose you were alluding to them. You bring them forward now to justify your charge of "fatal" against her. She has one fault; she wants courage; she has none other, not one that is not excuseable. We won't speak of France. What did her father say?'

'Colonel Halkett? I do not know. He and his daughter come here next week, and the colonel will expect to meet you here. That does not look like so positive an objection to you?'

'To me personally, no,' said Beauchamp. 'But Mr. Romfrey has not told me that I am to meet them.'

'Perhaps he has not thought it worth while. It is not his way. He has asked you to come. You and Miss Halkett will be left to yourselves. Her father assured Mr. Romfrey that he should not go beyond advising her. His advice might not be exactly favourable to you at present, but if you sued and she accepted—and she would, I am convinced she would; she was here with me, talking of you a whole afternoon, and I have eyes—then he would not oppose the match, and then I should see you settled, the husband of the handsomest wife and richest heiress in England.'

A vision of Cecilia swam before him, gracious in stateliness.

Two weeks back Renée's expression of a wish that he would marry had seemed to him an idle sentence in a letter breathing of her own intolerable situation. The marquis had been struck down by illness. What if she were to be soon suddenly free? But Renée could not be looking to freedom, otherwise she never would have written the wish for him to marry. She wrote perhaps

hearing temptation whisper; perhaps wishing to save herself and him by the aid of a tie that would bring his honour into play and fix his loyalty. He remembered Dr. Shrapnel's written words: '*Rebellion against society and advocacy of humanity run counter.*' They had a stronger effect on him than when he was ignorant of his uncle Everard's plan to match him with Cecilia. He took refuge from them in the image of that beautiful desolate Renée, born to be beloved, now wasted, worse than trodden under foot—perverted; a life that looked to him for direction and resuscitation. She was as good as dead in her marriage. It was impossible for him ever to think of Renée without the surprising thrill of his enchantment with her, and tender pity that drew her closer to him by darkening her brightness.

Still a man may love his wife. A wife like Cecilia was not to be imagined coldly. Let the knot once be tied, it would not be regretted, could not be; hers was a character, and hers a smile, firmly assuring him of that.

He told Mr. Romfrey that he should be glad to meet Colonel Halkett and Cecilia. Business called him to Holdesbury. Thence he betook himself to Dr. Shrapnel's cottage to say farewell to Jenny Denham previous to her departure for Switzerland with her friend Clara Sherwin. She had never seen a snow-mountain, and it was pleasant to him to observe in her eyes, which he had known weighing and balancing intellectual questions more than he quite liked, a childlike effort to conjure in imagination the glories of the Alps. She appeared very happy, only a little anxious about leaving Dr. Shrapnel with no one to take care of him for a whole month. Beauchamp promised he would run over to him from Holdesbury, only an hour by rail, as often as he could. He envied her the sight of the Alps, he said, and tried to give her an idea of them, from which he broke off to boast of a famous

little Jersey bull that he had won from a rival, an American, deeply in love with the bull; cutting him out by telegraph by just five minutes. The latter had examined the bull in the island and had passed on to Paris, not suspecting there would be haste to sell him. Beauchamp, seeing the bull advertized, took him on trust, galloped to the nearest telegraph station forthwith, and so obtained possession of him; and the bull was now shipped on the voyage. But for this precious bull, however, and other business, he would have been able to spend almost the entire month with Dr. Shrapnel, he said regretfully. Miss Denham on the contrary did not regret his active occupation. The story of his rush from the breakfast-table to the stables, and gallop away to the station, while the American Quaker gentleman soberly paced down a street in Paris on the same errand, in invisible rivalry, touched her risible fancy. She was especially pleased to think of him living in harmony with his uncle —that strange, lofty, powerful man, who by plot or by violence punished opposition to his will, but who must be kind at heart, as well as forethoughtful of his nephew's good; the assurance of it being, that when the conflict was at an end he had immediately installed him as manager of one of his estates, to give his energy play and make him practically useful.

The day before she left home was passed by the three in botanizing, some miles distant from Bevisham, over sand country, marsh and meadow; Dr. Shrapnel, deep in the science, on one side of her, and Beauchamp, requiring instruction in the names and properties of every plant and simple, on the other. It was a day of summer sweetness, gentle laughter, conversation, and the happiest homeliness. The politicians uttered barely a syllable of politics. The dinner basket was emptied heartily to make way for herb and flower, and at night the expedition

homeward was crowned with stars along a road refreshed by mid-day thunder-showers and smelling of the rain in the dust, past meadows keenly scenting, gardens giving out their innermost balm and odour. Late at night they drank tea in Jenny's own garden. They separated a little after two in the morning, when the faded Western light still lay warm on a bow of sky, and on the level of the East it quickened. Jenny felt sure she should long for that yesterday when she was among foreign scenes, even among high Alps—those mysterious eminences which seemed in her imagination to know of heaven and have the dawn of a new life for her beyond their peaks.

Her last words when stepping into the railway carriage were to Beauchamp: '*Will* you take care of him?' She flung her arms round Dr. Shrapnel's neck, and gazed at him under troubled eyelids which seemed to be passing in review every vision of possible harm that might come to him during her absence; and so she continued gazing, and at no one but Dr. Shrapnel until the bend of the line cut him from her sight. Beauchamp was a very secondary person on that occasion, and he was unused to being so in the society of women—unused to find himself entirely eclipsed by their interest in another. He speculated on it, wondering at her concentrated fervency; for he had not supposed her to possess much warmth.

After she was fairly off on her journey, Dr. Shrapnel mentioned to Beauchamp a case of a Steynham poacher, whom he had thought it his duty to supply with means of defence. It was a common poaching case.

Beauchamp was not surprised that Mr. Romfrey and Dr. Shrapnel should come to a collision; the marvel was that it had never occurred before, and Beauchamp said at once: 'Oh, my uncle Mr. Romfrey would rather see them stand their ground than not.' He was disposed

to think well of his uncle. The Jersey bull called him away to Holdesbury.

Captain Baskelett heard of this poaching case at Steynham, where he had to appear in person when he was in want of cheques, and the Bevisham dinner furnished an excuse for demanding one. He would have preferred a positive sum annually. Mr. Romfrey, however, though he wrote his cheques out like the lord he was by nature, exacted the request for them; a system that kept the gallant gentleman on his good behaviour, probably at a lower cost than the regular stipend. In handing the cheque to Cecil Baskelett, Mr. Romfrey spoke of a poacher, of an old poaching family called the Dicketts, who wanted punishment and was to have it, but Mr. Romfrey's local lawyer had informed him that the man Shrapnel was, as usual, supplying the means of defence. For his own part, Mr. Romfrey said, he had no objection to one rascal's backing another, and Shrapnel might hit his hardest, only perhaps Nevil might somehow get mixed up in it, and Nevil was going on quietly now—he had in fact just done capitally in lassoing with a shot of the telegraph a splendid little Jersey bull that a Yankee was after: and on the whole it was best to try to keep him quiet, for he was mad about that man Shrapnel; Shrapnel was his joss: and if legal knocks came of this business Nevil might be thinking of interfering: 'Or he and I may be getting to exchange a lot of shindy letters,' Mr. Romfrey said. 'Tell him I take Shrapnel just like any other man, and don't want to hear apologies, and I don't mix him up in it. Tell him if he likes to have an explanation from me, I 'll give it him when he comes here. You can run over to Holdesbury the morning after your dinner.'

Captain Baskelett said he would go. He was pleased with his cheque at the time, but hearing subsequently

that Nevil was coming to Steynham to meet Colonel Halkett and his daughter, he became displeased, considering it a very silly commission. The more he thought of it the more ridiculous and unworthy it appeared. He asked himself and Lord Palmet also why he should have to go to Nevil at Holdesbury to tell him of circumstances that he would hear of two or three days later at Steynham. There was no sense in it. The only conclusion for him was that the scheming woman Culling had determined to bring down every man concerned in the Bevisham election, and particularly Mr. Romfrey, on his knees before Nevil. Holdesbury had been placed at his disposal, and the use of the house in London, which latter would have been extremely serviceable to Cecil as a place of dinners to the Parliament of Great Britain in lieu of the speech-making generally expected of Members, and not so effectively performed. One would think the baron had grown afraid of old Nevil! He had spoken as if he were.

Cecil railed unreservedly to Lord Palmet against that woman 'Mistress Culling,' as it pleased him to term her, and who could be offended by his calling her so? His fine wit revelled in bestowing titles that were at once batteries directed upon persons he hated, and entrenchments for himself.

At four o'clock on a sultry afternoon he sat at table with his Bevisham supporters, and pledged them correspondingly in English hotel champagne, sherry and claret. At seven he was rid of them, but parched and heated, as he deserved to be, he owned, for drinking the poison. It would be a good subject for Parliament if he could get it up, he reflected.

'And now,' said he to Palmet, 'we might be crossing over to the Club if I hadn't to go about that stupid business to Holdesbury to-morrow morning. We shall miss the race, or, at least, the start.'

The idea struck him: 'Ten to one old Nevil 's with Shrapnel,' and no idea could be more natural.

'We 'll call on Shrapnel,' said Palmet. 'We shall see Jenny Denham. He gives her out as his niece. Whatever she is she 's a brimming little beauty. I assure you, Bask, you seldom see so pretty a girl.'

Wine, which has directed men's footsteps upon more marvellous adventures, took them to a chemist's shop for a cooling effervescent draught, and thence through the town to the address, furnished to them by the chemist, of Dr. Shrapnel on the common.

Bad wine, which is responsible for the fate of half the dismal bodies hanging from trees, weltering by rocks, grovelling and bleaching round the bedabbled mouth of the poet's Cave of Despair, had rendered Captain Baskelett's temper extremely irascible; so when he caught sight of Dr. Shrapnel walking in his garden, and perceived him of a giant's height, his eyes fastened on the writer of the abominable letter with an exultation peculiar to men having a devil inside them that kicks to be out. The sun was low, blazing among the thicker branches of the pollard forest trees, and through sprays of hawthorn. Dr. Shrapnel stopped, facing the visible master of men, at the end of his walk before he turned his back to continue the exercise and some discourse he was holding aloud either to the heavens or bands of invisible men.

'Ahem, Dr. Shrapnel!' He was accosted twice, the second time imperiously.

He saw two gentlemen outside the garden-hedge.

'I spoke, sir,' said Captain Baskelett.

'I hear you now, sir,' said the doctor, walking in a parallel line with them.

'I desired to know, sir, if you are Dr. Shrapnel?'

'I am.'

They arrived at the garden-gate.

'You have a charming garden, Dr. Shrapnel,' said Lord Palmet, very affably and loudly, with a steady observation of the cottage windows.

Dr. Shrapnel flung the gate open.

Lord Palmet raised his hat and entered, crying loudly, 'A very charming garden, upon my word!'

Captain Baskelett followed him, bowing stiffly.

'I am,' he said, 'Captain Beauchamp's cousin. I am Captain Baskelett, one of the Members for the borough.'

The doctor said, 'Ah.'

'I wish to see Captain Beauchamp, sir. He is absent?'

'I shall have him here shortly, sir.'

'Oh, you will have him!' Cecil paused.

'Admirable roses!' exclaimed Lord Palmet.

'You *have* him, I think,' said Cecil, 'if what we hear is correct. I wish to know, sir, whether the case you are conducting against his uncle is one you have communicated to Captain Beauchamp. I repeat, I am here to inquire if he is privy to it. You may hold family ties in contempt—Now, sir! I request you abstain from provocations with me.'

Dr. Shrapnel had raised his head, with something of the rush of a rocket, from the stooping posture to listen, and his frown of non-intelligence might be interpreted as the coming on of the fury Radicals are prone to, by a gentleman who believed in their constant disposition to explode.

Cecil made play with a pacifying hand. 'We shall arrive at no understanding unless you are good enough to be perfectly calm. I repeat, my cousin Captain Beauchamp is more or less at variance with his family, owing to these doctrines of yours, and your extraordinary Michael-Scott-the-wizard kind of spell you seem to have cast upon his common sense as a man of the world. *You have him*, as you say. I do not dispute it. I have no

doubt you have him fast. But here is a case demanding a certain respect for decency. Pray, if I may ask you, be still, be quiet, and hear me out if you can. I am accustomed to explain myself to the comprehension of most men who are at large, and I tell you candidly I am not to be deceived or diverted from my path by a show of ignorance.'

'What is your immediate object, sir?' said Dr. Shrapnel, chagrined by the mystification within him, and a fear that his patience was going.

'Exactly,' Cecil nodded. He was acute enough to see that he had established the happy commencement of fretfulness in the victim, which is equivalent to a hook well struck in the mouth of your fish, and with an angler's joy he prepared to play his man. 'Exactly. I have stated it. And you ask me. But I really must decline to run over the whole ground again for you. I am here to fulfil a duty to my family; a highly disagreeable one to me. I may fail, like the lady who came here previous to the Election, for the result of which I am assured I ought to thank your eminently disinterested services. I do. You recollect a lady calling on you?'

Dr. Shrapnel consulted his memory. 'I think I have a recollection of some lady calling.'

'Oh! you think you have a recollection of some lady calling.'

'Do you mean a lady connected with Captain Beauchamp?'

'A lady connected with Captain Beauchamp. You are not aware of the situation of the lady?'

'If I remember, she was a kind of confidential housekeeper, some one said, to Captain Beauchamp's uncle.'

'A kind of confidential housekeeper! She is recognized in our family as a lady, sir. I can hardly expect better treatment at your hands than she met with, but

I do positively request you to keep your temper whilst I am explaining my business to you. Now, sir! what now?'

A trifling breeze will set the tall tree bending, and Dr. Shrapnel did indeed appear to display the agitation of a full-driving storm when he was but harassed and vexed.

'Will you mention your business concisely, if you please?' he said.

'Precisely; it is my endeavour. I supposed I had done so. To be frank, I would advise you to summon a member of your household, wife, daughter, housekeeper, any one you like, to whom you may appeal, and I too, whenever your recollections are at fault.'

'I am competent,' said the doctor.

'But in justice to you,' urged Cecil considerately.

Dr. Shrapnel smoothed his chin hastily. 'Have you done?'

'Believe me, the instant I have an answer to my question, I have done.'

'Name your question.'

'Very well, sir. Now mark, I will be plain with you. There is no escape for you from this. You destroy my cousin's professional prospects—I request you to listen! —you blast his career in the navy; it was considered promising. He was a gallant officer and a smart seaman. Very well. You set him up as a politician, to be knocked down, to a dead certainty. You set him against his class; you embroil him with his family . . .'

'On all those points,' interposed Dr. Shrapnel, after dashing a hand to straighten his forelock; but Cecil vehemently entreated him to control his temper.

'I say you embroil him with his family, you cause him to be in everlasting altercation with his uncle Mr. Romfrey, materially to his personal detriment; and the question of his family is one that every man of sense would

apprehend on the spot; for we, you should know, have, sir, an opinion of Captain Beauchamp's talents and abilities forbidding us to think he could possibly be the total simpleton you make him appear, unless to the seductions of your political instructions, other seductions were added. . . . You apprehend me, I am sure.'

'I don't,' cried the doctor, descending from his height and swinging about forlornly.

'Oh! yes, you do; you do indeed, you cannot avoid it; you quite apprehend me; it is admitted that you take my meaning: I insist on that. I have nothing to say but what is complimentary of the young lady, whoever she may turn out to be; bewitching, no doubt; and to speak frankly, Dr. Shrapnel, I, and I am pretty certain every honest man would think with me, I take it to be ten times more creditable to my cousin Captain Beauchamp that he should be under a lady's influence than under yours. Come, sir! I ask you. You must confess that a gallant officer and great admirer of the sex does not look such a donkey if he is led in silken strings by a beautiful creature. And mark—stop! mark this, Dr. Shrapnel: I say, to the lady we can all excuse a good deal, and at the same time you are to be congratulated on first-rate diplomacy in employing so charming an agent. I wish, I really wish you did it generally, I assure you: only, mark this—I do beg you to contain yourself for a minute, if possible—I say, my cousin Captain Beauchamp is fair game to hunt, and there is no law to prevent the chase, only you must not expect us to be quiet spectators of your sport; and we have, I say, undoubtedly a right to lay the case before the lady, and induce her to be a peace-agent in the family if we can. Very well.'

'This garden is redolent of a lady's hand,' sighed Palmet, poetical in his dejection.

'Have you taken too much wine, gentlemen?' said Dr. Shrapnel.

Cecil put this impertinence aside with a graceful sweep of his fingers. 'You attempt to elude me, sir.'

'Not I! You mention some lady.'

'Exactly. A young lady.'

'What is the name of the lady?'

'Oh! You ask the name of the lady. And I too. What is it? I have heard two or three names.'

'Then you have heard villanies.'

'Denham, Jenny Denham, Miss Jenny Denham,' said Palmet, rejoiced at the opportunity of trumpeting her name so that she should not fail to hear it.

'I stake my reputation I have heard her called Shrapnel —Miss Shrapnel,' said Cecil.

The doctor glanced hastily from one to the other of his visitors. 'The young lady is my ward; I am her guardian,' he said.

Cecil pursed his mouth. 'I have heard her called your niece.'

'Niece—ward; she is a lady by birth and education, in manners, accomplishments, and character; and she is under my protection,' cried Dr. Shrapnel.

Cecil bowed. 'So you are for gentle birth? I forgot: you are for morality too, and for praying; exactly; I recollect. But now let me tell you, entirely with the object of conciliation, my particular desire is to see the young lady, in your presence of course, and endeavour to persuade her, as I have very little doubt I shall do, assuming that you give me fair play, to exercise her influence, on this occasion contrary to yours, and save my cousin Captain Beauchamp from a fresh misunderstanding with his uncle Mr. Romfrey. Now, sir; now, there!'

'You will not see Miss Denham with my sanction ever,' said Dr. Shrapnel.

'Oh! Then I perceive your policy. Mark, sir, my assumption was that the young lady would, on hearing my representations, exert herself to heal the breach between Captain Beauchamp and his family. You stand in the way. You treat me as you treated the lady who came here formerly to wrest your dupe from your clutches. If I mistake not, she saw the young lady you acknowledge to be your ward.'

Dr. Shrapnel flashed back: 'I acknowledge? Mercy and justice! is there no peace with the man? You walk here to me, I can't yet guess why, from a town where I have enemies, and every scandal flies touching me and mine; and you——' He stopped short to master his anger. He subdued it so far as to cloak it in an attempt to speak reasoningly, as angry men sometimes deceive themselves in doing, despite the good maxim for the wrathful—speak not at all. 'See,' said he, 'I was never married. My dear friend dies, and leaves me his child to protect and rear; and though she bears her father's name, she is most wrongly and foully made to share the blows levelled at her guardian. Ay, have at me, all of you, as much as you will! Hold off from her. Were it true, the cowardice would be not a whit the smaller. Why, casting a stone like that, were it the size of a pebble and the weight of a glance, is to toss the whole cowardly world on an innocent young girl. And why suspect evil? You talk of that lady who paid me a visit here once, and whom I treated becomingly, I swear. I never do otherwise. She was a handsome woman; and what was she? The housekeeper of Captain Beauchamp's uncle. Hear me, if you please! To go with the world, I have as good a right to suppose the worst of an attractive lady in that situation as you regarding my ward: better warrant for scandalizing, I think;—to go with the world. But now——'

Cecil checked him, ejaculating, 'Thank you, Dr. Shrapnel; I thank you most cordially,' with a shining smile. 'Stay, sir! no more. I take my leave of you. Not another word. No "buts"! I recognize that conciliation is out of the question: you are the natural protector of poachers, and you will not grant me an interview with the young lady you call your ward, that I may represent to her, as a person we presume to have a chance of moving you, how easily—I am determined you shall hear me, Dr. Shrapnel!—how easily the position of Captain Beauchamp may become precarious with his uncle Mr. Romfrey. And let me add—"but" and "but" me till Doomsday, sir!—if you were—I *do* hear you, sir, and you shall hear me—if you were a younger man, I say, I would hold you answerable to me for your scandalous and disgraceful insinuations.'

Dr. Shrapnel was adroitly fenced and over-shouted. He shrugged, stuttered, swayed, wagged a bulrush-head, flapped his elbows, puffed like a swimmer in the breakers, tried many times to expostulate, and finding the effort useless, for his adversary was copious and commanding, relapsed, eyeing him as an object far removed.

Cecil rounded one of his perplexingly empty sentences and turned on his heel.

'War, then!' he said.

'As you like,' retorted the doctor.

'Oh! Very good. Good evening.' Cecil slightly lifted his hat, with the short projection of the head of the stately peacock in its walk, and passed out of the garden. Lord Palmet, deeply disappointed and mystified, went after him, leaving Dr. Shrapnel to shorten his garden walk with enormous long strides.

'I 'm afraid you didn't manage the old boy,' Palmet complained. 'They 're people who have tea in their gardens; we might have sat down with them and talked,

the best friends in the world, and come again to-morrow: might have called her Jenny in a week. She didn't show her pretty nose at any of the windows.'

His companion pooh-poohed and said: 'Foh! I'm afraid I permitted myself to lose my self-command for a moment.'

Palmet sang out an amorous couplet to console himself. Captain Baskelett respected the poetic art for its magical power over woman's virtue, but he disliked hearing verses, and they were ill-suited to Palmet. He abused his friend roundly, telling him it was contemptible to be quoting verses. He was irritable still.

He declared himself nevertheless much refreshed by his visit to Dr. Shrapnel. 'We shall have to sleep to-night in this unhallowed town, but I needn't be off to Holdesbury in the morning; I've done my business. I shall write to the baron to-night, and we can cross the water to-morrow in time for operations.'

The letter to Mr. Romfrey was composed before midnight. It was a long one, and when he had finished it, Cecil remembered that the act of composition had been assisted by a cigar in his mouth, and Mr. Romfrey detested the smell of tobacco. There was nothing to be done but to write the letter over again, somewhat more briefly: it ran thus:—

'Thinking to kill two birds at a blow, I went yesterday with Palmet after the dinner at this place to Shrapnel's house, where, as I heard, I stood a chance of catching friend Nevil. The young person living under the man's protection was absent, and so was the "poor dear commander," perhaps attending on his bull. Shrapnel said he was expecting him. I write to you to confess I thought myself a cleverer fellow than I am. I talked to Shrapnel and tried hard to reason with him. I hope I can keep my temper under ordinary circumstances. You will

understand that it required remarkable restraint when I make you acquainted with the fact that a lady's name was introduced, which, as your representative in relation to her, I was bound to defend from a gratuitous and scoundrelly aspersion. Shrapnel's epistle to "brave Beauchamp" is Church hymnification in comparison with his conversation. He is indubitably one of the greatest ruffians of his time.

'I took the step with the best of intentions, and all I can plead is that I am not a diplomatist of sixty. His last word was that he is for war with us. As far as we men are concerned it is of small importance. I should think that the sort of society he would scandalize a lady in is not much to be feared. I have given him his warning. He tops me by about a head, and loses his temper every two minutes. I could have drawn him out deliciously if he had not rather disturbed mine. By this time my equanimity is restored. The only thing I apprehend is your displeasure with me for having gone to the man. I have done no good, and it prevents me from running over to Holdesbury to see Nevil, for if "shindy letters," as you call them, are bad, shindy meetings are worse. I should be telling him my opinion of Shrapnel, he would be firing out, I should retort, he would yell, I should snap my fingers, and he would go into convulsions. I am convinced that a cattle-breeder ought to keep himself particularly calm. So unless I have further orders from you I refrain from going.

'The dinner was enthusiastic. I sat three hours among my Commons, they on me for that length of time—fatiguing, but a duty.'

Cecil subscribed his name with the warmest affection toward his uncle.

The brevity of the second letter had not brought him nearer to the truth in rescinding the picturesque

accessories of his altercation with Dr. Shrapnel, but it veraciously expressed the sentiments he felt, and that was the palpable truth for him.

He posted the letter next morning.

CHAPTER XXXI

SHOWING A CHIVALROUS GENTLEMAN SET IN MOTION

About noon the day following, on board the steam-yacht of the Countess of Menai, Cecil was very much astonished to see Mr. Romfrey descending into a boat hard by, from Grancey Lespel's hired cutter. Steam was up, and the countess was off for a cruise in the Channel, as it was not a race-day, but seeing Mr. Romfrey's hand raised, she spoke to Cecil, and immediately gave orders to wait for the boat. This lady was a fervent admirer of the knightly gentleman, and had reason to like him, for he had once been her champion. Mr. Romfrey mounted the steps, received her greeting, and beckoned to Cecil. He carried a gold-headed horsewhip under his arm. Lady Menai would gladly have persuaded him to be one of her company for the day's voyage, but he said he had business in Bevisham, and moving aside with Cecil, put the question to him abruptly: 'What were the words used by Shrapnel?'

'The identical words?' Captain Baskelett asked. He could have tripped out the words with the fluency of ancient historians relating what great kings, ambassadors, or Generals may well have uttered on State occasions, but if you want the identical words, who is to remember them the day after they have been delivered? He said: 'Well, as for the identical words, I really, and I was

tolerably excited, sir, and upon my honour, the identical words are rather difficult to . . .' He glanced at the horsewhip, and pricked by the sight of it to proceed, thought it good to soften the matter if possible. 'I don't quite recollect . . . I wrote off to you rather hastily. I think he said—but Palmet was there.'

'Shrapnel spoke the words before Lord Palmet?' said Mr. Romfrey austerely.

Captain Baskelett summoned Palmet to come near, and inquired of him what he had heard Shrapnel say, suggesting: 'He spoke of a handsome woman for a housekeeper, and all the world knew her character?'

Mr. Romfrey cleared his throat.

'Or knew she had *no* character,' Cecil pursued in a fit of gratified spleen, in scorn of the woman. 'Don't you recollect his accent in pronouncing *housekeeper*?'

The menacing thunder sounded from Mr. Romfrey. He was patient in appearance, and waited for Cecil's witness to corroborate the evidence.

It happened (and here we are in one of the circles of small things producing great consequences, which have inspired diminutive philosophers with ironical visions of history and the littleness of man), it happened that Lord Palmet, the humanest of young aristocrats, well-disposed toward the entire world, especially to women, also to men in any way related to pretty women, had just lit a cigar, and it was a cigar that he had been recommended to try the flavour of; and though he, having his wits about him, was fully aware that shipboard is no good place for a trial of the delicacy of tobacco in the leaf, he had begun puffing and sniffing in a critical spirit, and scarcely knew for the moment what to decide as to this particular cigar. He remembered, however, Mr. Romfrey's objection to tobacco. Imagining that he saw the expression of a profound distaste in that gentleman's more than usually

serious face, he hesitated between casting the cigar into the water and retaining it. He decided upon the latter course, and held the cigar behind his back, bowing to Mr. Romfrey at about a couple of yards distance, and saying to Cecil, 'Housekeeper; yes, I remember hearing housekeeper. I think so. Housekeeper? yes, oh yes.'

'And handsome housekeepers were doubtful characters,' Captain Baskelett prompted him.

Palmet laughed out a single 'Ha!' that seemed to excuse him for lounging away to the forepart of the vessel, where he tugged at his fine specimen of a cigar to rekindle it, and discharged it with a wry grimace, so delicate is the flavour of that weed, and so adversely ever is it affected by a breeze and a moist atmosphere. He could then return undivided in his mind to Mr. Romfrey and Cecil, but the subject was not resumed in his presence.

The Countess of Menai steamed into Bevisham to land Mr. Romfrey there. 'I can be out in the Channel any day; it is not every day that I see you,' she said, in support of her proposal to take him over.

They sat together conversing, apart from the rest of the company, until they sighted Bevisham, when Mr. Romfrey stood up, and a little crowd of men came round him to enjoy his famous racy talk. Captain Baskelett offered to land with him. He declined companionship. Dropping her hand in his, the countess asked him what he had to do in that town, and he replied, 'I have to demand an apology.'

Answering the direct look of his eyes, she said, 'Oh, I shall not speak of it.'

In his younger days, if the rumour was correct, he had done the same on her account.

He stepped into the boat, and presently they saw him mount the pier-steps, with the riding-whip under his arm,

his head more than commonly bent, a noticeable point in a man of his tall erect figure. The ladies and some of the gentlemen thought he was looking particularly grave, even sorrowful.

Lady Menai inquired of Captain Baskelett whether he knew the nature of his uncle's business in Bevisham, the town he despised.

What could Cecil say but no? His uncle had not imparted it to him.

She was flattered in being the sole confidante, and said no more.

The sprightly ingenuity of Captain Baskelett's mind would have informed him of the nature of his uncle's expedition, we may be sure, had he put it to the trial; for Mr. Romfrey was as plain to read as a rudimentary sum in arithmetic, and like the tracings of a pedigree-map his preliminary steps to deeds were seen pointing on their issue in lines of straight descent. But Cecil could protest that he was not bound to know, and considering that he was neither bound to know nor to speculate, he determined to stand on his right. So effectually did he accomplish the task, that he was frequently surprised during the evening and the night by the effervescence of a secret exultation rising imp-like within him, that was, he assured himself, perfectly unaccountable.

CHAPTER XXXII

AN EFFORT TO CONQUER CECILIA IN BEAUCHAMP'S FASHION

The day after Mr. Romfrey's landing in Bevisham a full South-wester stretched the canvas of yachts of all classes, schooner, cutter and yawl, on the lively green

water between the island and the forest shore. Cecilia's noble schooner was sure to be out in such a ringing breeze, for the pride of it as well as the pleasure. She landed her father at the Club steps, and then bore away Eastward to sight a cutter race, the breeze beginning to stiffen. Looking back against sun and wind, she saw herself pursued by a saucy little 15-ton craft that had been in her track since she left the Otley river before noon, dipping and straining, with every inch of sail set; as mad a stern chase as ever was witnessed: and who could the man at the tiller, clad cap-à-pie in tarpaulin, be? She led him dancing away, to prove his resoluteness and laugh at him. She had the powerful wings, and a glory in them coming of this pursuit: her triumph was delicious, until the occasional sparkle of the tarpaulin was lost, the small boat appeared a motionless object far behind, and all ahead of her exceedingly dull, though the race hung there and the crowd of sail.

Cecilia's transient flutter of coquettry created by the animating air and her queenly flight was over. She fled splendidly and she came back graciously. But he refused her open hand, as it were. He made as if to stand across her tack, and, reconsidering it, evidently scorned his advantage and challenged the stately vessel for a beat up against the wind. It was as pretty as a Court minuet. But presently Cecilia stood too far on one tack, and returning to the centre of the channel, found herself headed by seamanship. He waved an ironical salute with his sou'wester. Her retort consisted in bringing her vessel to the wind, and sending a boat for him.

She did it on the impulse; had she consulted her wishes she would rather have seen him at his post, where he seemed in his element, facing the spray and cunningly calculating to get wind and tide in his favour. Partly with regret she saw him, stripped of his tarpaulin, jump

into her boat, as though she had once more to say farewell to sailor Nevil Beauchamp; farewell the bright youth, the hero, the true servant of his country!

That feeling of hers changed when he was on board. The stirring cordial day had put new breath in him.

'Should not the flag be dipped?' he said, looking up at the peak, where the white flag streamed.

'Can you really mistake compassion for defeat?' said she, with a smile.

'Oh! before the wind of course I hadn't a chance.'

'How could you be so presumptuous as to give chase? And who has lent you that little cutter?'

Beauchamp had hired her for a month, and he praised her sailing, and pretended to say that the race was not always to the strong in a stiff breeze.

'But in point of fact I was bent on trying how my boat swims, and had no idea of overhauling you. To-day our salt-water lake is as fine as the Mediterranean.'

'Omitting the islands and the Mediterranean colour, it is. I have often told you how I love it. I have landed papa at the Club. Are you aware that we meet you at Steynham the day after to-morrow?'

'Well, we can ride on the downs. The downs between three and four of a summer's morning are as lovely as anything in the world. They have the softest outlines imaginable . . . and remind me of a friend's upper lip when she deigns to smile.'

'Is one to rise at that hour to behold the effect? And let me remind you further, Nevil, that the comparison of nature's minor work beside her mighty is an error, if you will be poetical.'

She cited a well-known instance of degradation in verse.

But a young man who happens to be intimately acquainted with a certain 'dark eye in woman' will not so

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lightly be brought to consider that the comparison of tempestuous night to the flashing of those eyes of hers topples the scene headlong from grandeur. And if Beauchamp remembered rightly, the scene was the Alps at night.

He was prepared to contest Cecilia's judgement. At that moment the breeze freshened and the canvas lifted: from due South the yacht swung her sails to drive toward the West, and Cecilia's face and hair came out golden in the sunlight. Speech was difficult, admiration natural, so he sat beside her, admiring in silence.

She said a good word for the smartness of his little yacht.

'This is my first trial of her,' said Beauchamp. 'I hired her chiefly to give Dr. Shrapnel a taste of salt air. I 've no real right to be idling about. His ward Miss Denham is travelling in Switzerland; the dear old man is alone, and not quite so well as I should wish. Change of scene will do him good. I shall land him on the French coast for a couple of days, or take him down Channel.'

Cecilia gazed abstractedly at a passing schooner.

'He works too hard,' said Beauchamp.

'Who does?'

'Dr. Shrapnel.'

Some one else whom we have heard of works too hard, and it would be happy for mankind if he did not.

Cecilia named the schooner; an American that had beaten our crack yachts. Beauchamp sprang up to spy at the American.

'That 's the Corinne, is she!'

Yankee craftiness on salt water always excited his respectful attention as a spectator.

'And what is the name of your boat, Nevil?'

'The fool of an owner calls her the Petrel. It 's not that I 'm superstitious, but to give a boat a name of bad

augury to sailors appears to me . . . however, I 've argued it with him and I will have her called the Curlew. Carrying Dr. Shrapnel and me, Petrel would be thought the proper title for her—isn't that your idea?'

He laughed and she smiled, and then he became overcast with his political face, and said, 'I hope—I believe —you will alter your opinion of him. Can it be an opinion when it 's founded on nothing? You know really nothing of him. I have in my pocket what I believe would alter your mind about him entirely. I do think so; and I think so because I feel you would appreciate his deep sincerity and real nobleness.'

'Is it a talisman that you have, Nevil?'

'No, it 's a letter.'

Cecilia's cheeks took fire.

'I should so much like to read it to you,' said he.

'Do not, please,' she replied with a dash of supplication in her voice.

'Not the whole of it—an extract here and there? I want you so much to understand him.'

'I am sure I should not.'

'Let me try you!'

'Pray do not.'

'Merely to show you . . .'

'But, Nevil, I do not wish to understand him.'

'But you have only to listen for a few minutes, and I want you to know what good reason I have to reverence him as a teacher and a friend.'

Cecilia looked at Beauchamp with wonder. A confused recollection of the contents of the letter declaimed at Mount Laurels in Captain Baskelett's absurd sing-song, surged up in her mind revoltingly. She signified a decided negative. Something of a shudder accompanied the expression of it.

But he as little as any member of the Romfrey blood

was framed to let the word no stand quietly opposed to him. And the no that a woman utters! It calls for wholesome tyranny. Those old, those hoar-old duellists, Yes and No, have rarely been better matched than in Beauchamp and Cecilia. For if he was obstinate in attack she had great resisting power. Twice to listen to that letter was beyond her endurance. Indeed it cast a shadow on him and disfigured him; and when, affecting to plead, he said: 'You must listen to it to please me, for my sake, Cecilia,' she answered: 'It is for your sake, Nevil, I decline to.'

'Why, what do you know of it?' he exclaimed.

'I know the kind of writing it would be.'

'How do you know it?'

'I have heard of some of Dr. Shrapnel's opinions.'

'You imagine him to be subversive, intolerant, immoral, and the rest! all that comes under your word revolutionary.'

'Possibly; but I must defend myself from hearing what I know will be certain to annoy me.'

'But he is the reverse of immoral: and I intend to read you parts of the letter to prove to you that he is not the man you would blame, but I, and that if ever I am worthier . . . worthier of you, as I hope to become, it will be owing to this admirable and good old man.'

Cecilia trembled: she was touched to the quick. Yet it was not pleasant to her to be wooed obliquely, through Dr. Shrapnel.

She recognized the very letter, crowned with many stamps, thick with many pages, in Beauchamp's hands.

'When you are at Steynham you will probably hear my uncle Everard's version of this letter,' he said. 'The baron chooses to think everything fair in war, and the letter came accidentally into his hands with the seal broken; well, he read it. And, Cecilia, you can fancy

the sort of stuff he would make of it. Apart from that, I want you particularly to know how much I am indebted to Dr. Shrapnel. Won't you learn to like him a little? Won't you tolerate him?—I could almost say, for my sake! He and I are at variance on certain points, but taking him altogether, I am under deeper obligations to him than to any man on earth. He has found where I bend and waver.'

'I recognize your chivalry, Nevil.'

'He has done his best to train me to be of some service. Where 's the chivalry in owning a debt? He is one of our true warriors; fearless and blameless. I have had my heroes before. You know how I loved Robert Hall: his death is a gap in my life. He is a light for fighting Englishmen—who fight with the sword. But the scale of the war, the cause, and the end in view, raise Dr. Shrapnel above the bravest I have ever had the luck to meet. Soldiers and sailors have their excitement to keep them up to the mark; praise and rewards. He is in his eight-and-sixtieth year, and he has never received anything but obloquy for his pains. Half of the small fortune he has goes in charities and subscriptions. Will that touch you? But I think little of that, and so does he. Charity is a common duty. The dedication of a man's life and whole mind to a cause, there 's heroism. I wish I were eloquent; I wish I could move you.'

Cecilia turned her face to him. 'I listen to you with pleasure, Nevil; but please do not read the letter.'

'Yes; a paragraph or two I must read.'

She rose.

He was promptly by her side. 'If I say I ask you for one sign that you care for me in some degree?'

'I have not for a moment ceased to be your friend, Nevil, since I was a child.'

'But if you allow yourself to be so prejudiced against

my best friend that you will not hear a word of his writing, are you friendly?'

'Feminine, and obstinate,' said Cecilia.

'Give me your eyes an instant. I know you think me reckless and lawless: now is not that true? You doubt whether, if a lady gave me her hand I should hold to it in perfect faith. Or, perhaps not that: but you do suspect I should be capable of every sophism under the sun to persuade a woman to break her faith, if it suited me: supposing some passion to be at work. Men who are open to passion have to be taught reflection before they distinguish between the woman they should sue for love because she would be their best mate, and the woman who has thrown a spell on them. Now, what I beg you to let me read you in this letter is a truth nobly stated that has gone into my blood, and changed me. It cannot fail, too, in changeing your opinion of Dr. Shrapnel. It makes me wretched that you should be divided from me in your ideas of him. I, you see—and I confess I think it my chief title to honour—reverence him.'

'I regret that I am unable to utter the words of Ruth,' said Cecilia, in a low voice. She felt rather tremulously; opposed only to the letter and the writer of it, not at all to Beauchamp, except on account of his idolatry of the wicked revolutionist. Far from having a sense of opposition to Beauchamp, she pitied him for his infatuation, and in her lofty mental serenity she warmed to him for the seeming boyishness of his constant and extravagant worship of the man, though such an enthusiasm cast shadows on his intellect.

He was reading a sentence of the letter.

'I hear nothing but the breeze, Nevil,' she said.

The breeze fluttered the letter-sheets: they threatened to fly. Cecilia stepped two paces away.

'Hark; there is a military band playing on the pier,'

said she. 'I am so fond of hearing music a little off shore.'

Beauchamp consigned the letter to his pocket.

'You are not offended, Nevil?'

'Dear me, no. You haven't a mind for tonics, that 's all.'

'Healthy persons rarely have,' she remarked, and asked him, smiling softly, whether he had a mind for music.

His insensibility to music was curious, considering how impressionable he was to verse, and to songs of birds. He listened with an oppressed look, as to something the particular secret of which had to be reached by a determined effort of sympathy for those whom it affected. He liked it if she did, and said he liked it, reiterated that he liked it, clearly trying hard to comprehend it, as unmoved by the swell and sigh of the resonant brass as a man could be, while her romantic spirit thrilled to it, and was bountiful in glowing visions and in tenderness.

There hung her hand. She would not have refused to yield it. The hero of her childhood, the friend of her womanhood, and her hero still, might have taken her with half a word.

Beauchamp was thinking: She can listen to that brass band, and she shuts her ears to this letter!

The reading of it would have been a prelude to the opening of his heart to her, at the same time that it vindicated his dear and honoured master, as he called Dr. Shrapnel. To speak, without the explanation of his previous reticence which this letter would afford, seemed useless: even the desire to speak was absent, passion being absent.

'I see papa; he is getting into a boat with some one,' said Cecilia, and gave orders for the yacht to stand in toward the Club steps. 'Do you know, Nevil, the Italian common people are not so subject to the charm of music

as other races? They have more of the gift, and I think less of the feeling. You do not hear much music in Italy. I remember in the year of Revolution there was danger of a rising in some Austrian city, and a colonel of a regiment commanded his band to play. The mob was put in good humour immediately.'

'It 's a soporific,' said Beauchamp.

'You would not rather have had them rise to be slaughtered?'

'Would you have them waltzed into perpetual servility?'

Cecilia hummed, and suggested: 'If one can have them happy in any way?'

'Then the day of destruction may almost be dated.'

'Nevil, your terrible view of life must be false.'

'I make it out worse to you than to any one else, because I want our minds to be united.'

'Give me a respite now and then.'

'With all my heart. And forgive me for beating my drum. I see what others don't see, or else I feel it more; I don't know; but it appears to me our country needs rousing if it 's to live. There 's a division between poor and rich that you have no conception of, and it can't safely be left unnoticed. I 've done.'

He looked at her and saw tears on her under-lids.

'My dearest Cecilia!'

'Music makes me childish,' said she.

Her father was approaching in the boat. Beside him sat the Earl of Lockrace, latterly classed among the suitors of the lady of Mount Laurels.

A few minutes remained to Beauchamp of his lost opportunity. Instead of seizing them with his usual promptitude, he let them slip, painfully mindful of his treatment of her last year after the drive into Bevisham, when she was England, and Renée holiday France.

This feeling he fervently translated into the reflection that the bride who would bring him beauty and wealth, and her especial gift of tender womanliness, was not yet so thoroughly mastered as to grant her husband his just prevalence with her, or even indeed his complete independence of action, without which life itself was not desireable.

Colonel Halkett stared at Beauchamp as if he had risen from the deep.

'Have you been in that town this morning?' was one of his first questions to him when he stood on board.

'I came through it,' said Beauchamp, and pointed to his little cutter labouring in the distance. 'She 's mine for a month; I came from Holdesbury to try her'; and then he stated how he had danced attendance on the schooner for a couple of hours before any notice was taken of him, and Cecilia with her graceful humour held up his presumption to scorn.

Her father was eyeing Beauchamp narrowly, and appeared troubled.

'Did you see Mr. Romfrey yesterday, or this morning?' the colonel asked him, mentioning that Mr. Romfrey had been somewhere about the island yesterday, at which Beauchamp expressed astonishment, for his uncle Everard seldom visited a yachting station.

Colonel Halkett exchanged looks with Cecilia. Hers were inquiring, and he confirmed her side-glance at Beauchamp. She raised her brows; he nodded, to signify that there was gravity in the case. Here the signalling stopped short; she had to carry on a conversation with Lord Lockrace, one of those men who betray the latent despot in an exhibition of discontentment unless they have all a lady's hundred eyes attentive to their discourse.

At last Beauchamp quitted the vessel.

When he was out of hearing, Colonel Halkett said to

Cecilia: 'Grancey Lespel tells me that Mr. Romfrey called on the man Shrapnel yesterday evening at six o'clock.'

'Yes, papa?'

'Now come and see the fittings below,' the colonel addressed Lord Lockrace, and murmured to his daughter: 'And soundly horsewhipped him!'

Cecilia turned on the instant to gaze after Nevil Beauchamp. She could have wept for pity. Her father's emphasis on 'soundly' declared an approval of the deed, and she was chilled by a sickening abhorrence and dread of the cruel brute in men, such as, awakened by she knew not what, had haunted her for a year of her girlhood.

'And he deserved it!' the colonel pursued, on emerging from the cabin at Lord Lockrace's heels. 'I've no doubt he richly deserved it. The writer of that letter we heard Captain Baskelett read the other day deserves the very worst he gets.'

'Baskelett bored the Club the other night with a letter of a Radical fellow,' said Lord Lockrace. 'Men who write that stuff should be strung up and whipped by the common hangman.'

'It was a private letter,' said Cecilia.

'Public or private, Miss Halkett.'

Her mind flew back to Seymour Austin for the sense of stedfastness when she heard such language as this, which, taken in conjunction with Dr. Shrapnel's, seemed to uncloak our Constitutional realm and show it boiling up with the frightful elements of primitive societies.

'I suppose we are but half civilized,' she said.

'If that,' said the earl.

Colonel Halkett protested that he never could quite make out what Radicals were driving at.

'The rents,' Lord Lockrace observed in the conclusive tone of brevity. He did not stay very long.

The schooner was boarded subsequently by another nobleman, an Admiral of the Fleet and ex-minister of the Whig Government, Lord Croyston, who was a friend of Mr. Romfrey's, and thought well of Nevil Beauchamp as a seaman and naval officer, but shook an old head over him as a politician. He came to beg a passage across the water to his marine Lodge, an accident having happened early in the morning to his yacht, the Lady Violet. He was able to communicate the latest version of the horse-whipping of Dr. Shrapnel, from which it appeared that after Mr. Romfrey had handsomely flogged the man he flung his card on the prostrate body, to let men know who was responsible for the act. He expected that Mr. Romfrey would be subjected to legal proceedings. 'But if there 's a pleasure worth paying for it 's the trouncing of a villain,' said he; and he had been informed that Dr. Shrapnel was a big one. Lord Croyston's favourite country residence was in the neighbourhood of old Mrs. Beauchamp, on the Upper Thames. Speaking of Nevil Beauchamp a second time, he alluded to his relations with his great-aunt, said his prospects were bad, that she had interdicted her house to him, and was devoted to her other great-nephew.

'And so she should be,' said Colonel Halkett. 'That 's a young man who 's an Englishman without French gunpowder notions in his head. He works for us down at the mine in Wales a good part of the year, and has tided us over a threatening strike there: gratuitously: I can't get him to accept anything. I can't think why he does it.'

'He 'll have plenty,' said Lord Croyston, levelling his telescope to sight the racing cutters.

Cecilia fancied she descried Nevil's Petrel, dubbed Curlew, to Eastward, and had a faint gladness in the thought that his knowledge of his uncle Everard's deed

of violence would be deferred for another two or three hours.

She tried to persuade her father to wait for Nevil, and invite him to dine at Mount Laurels, and break the news to him gently. Colonel Halkett argued that in speaking of the affair he should certainly not commiserate the man who had got his deserts, and saying this he burst into a petty fury against the epistle of Dr. Shrapnel, which appeared to be growing more monstrous in proportion to his forgetfulness of the details, as mountains gather vastness to the eye at a certain remove. Though he could not guess the reason for Mr. Romfrey's visit to Bevisham, he was, he said, quite prepared to maintain that Mr. Romfrey had a perfect justification for his conduct.

Cecilia hinted at barbarism. The colonel hinted at high police duties that gentlemen were sometimes called on to perform for the protection of society. 'In defiance of its laws?' she asked; and he answered: 'Women must not be judging things out of their sphere,' with the familiar accent on 'women' which proves their inferiority. He was rarely guilty of it toward his daughter. Evidently he had resolved to back Mr. Romfrey blindly. That epistle of Dr. Shrapnel's merited condign punishment and had met with it, he seemed to rejoice in saying: and this was his abstract of the same: 'An old charlatan who tells his dupe to pray every night of his life for the beheading of kings and princes, and scattering of the clergy, and disbanding the army, that he and his rabble may fall upon the wealthy, and show us numbers win; and he 'll undertake to make them moral!'

'I wish we were not going to Steynham,' said Cecilia.

'So do I. Well, no, I don't,' the colonel corrected himself, 'no; it 's an engagement. I gave my consent so far. We shall see whether Nevil Beauchamp 's a man of any sense.'

Her heart sank. This was as much as to let her know that if Nevil broke with his uncle, the treaty of union between the two families, which her father submitted to entertain out of consideration for Mr. Romfrey, would be at an end.

The wind had fallen. Entering her river, Cecilia gazed back at the smooth broad water, and the band of golden beams flung across it from the evening sun over the forest. No little cutter was visible. She could not write to Nevil to bid him come and concert with her in what spirit to encounter his uncle Everard at Steynham. And guests would be at Mount Laurels next day; Lord Lockrace, Lord Croyston, and the Lespels; she could not drive down to Bevisham on the chance of seeing him. Nor was it to be acknowledged even to herself that she so greatly desired to see him and advise him. Why not? Because she was one of the artificial creatures called women (with the accent) who dare not be spontaneous, and cannot act independently if they would continue to be admirable in the world's eye, and who for that object must remain fixed on shelves, like other marketable wares, avoiding motion to avoid shattering or tarnishing. This is their fate, only in degree less inhuman than that of Hellenic and Trojan princesses offered up to the Gods, or pretty slaves to the dealers. Their artificiality is at once their bane and their source of superior pride.

Seymour Austin might have reason for seeking to emancipate them, she thought, and blushed in thought that she could never be learning anything but from her own immediate sensations.

Of course it was in her power to write to Beauchamp, just as it had been in his to speak to her, but the fire was wanting in her blood and absent from his mood, so they were kept apart.

Her father knew as little as she what was the positive cause of Mr. Romfrey's chastisement of Dr. Shrapnel. 'Cause enough, I don't doubt,' he said, and cited the mephitic letter.

Cecilia was not given to suspicions, or she would have had them kindled by a certain wilfulness in his incessant reference to the letter, and exoneration, if not approval, of Mr. Romfrey's conduct.

How did that chivalrous gentleman justify himself for condescending to such an extreme as the use of personal violence? Was there a possibility of his justifying it to Nevil? She was most wretched in her reiteration of these inquiries, for, with a heart subdued, she had still a mind whose habit of independent judgement was not to be constrained, and while she felt that it was only by siding with Nevil submissively and blindly in this lamentable case that she could hope for happiness, she foresaw the likelihood of her not being able to do so as much as he would desire and demand. This she took for the protest of her pure reason. In reality, grieved though she was on account of that Dr. Shrapnel, her captive heart resented the anticipated challenge to her to espouse his cause or languish.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE FIRST ENCOUNTER AT STEYNHAM

The judge pronouncing sentence of condemnation on the criminal is proverbially a sorrowfully-minded man; and still more would he be so had he to undertake the part of executioner as well. This is equivalent to saying that the simple pleasures are no longer with us; it must be a personal enemy now to give us any satisfaction in chastising

and slaying. Perhaps by-and-by that will be savourless: we degenerate. There is, nevertheless, ever (and let nature be praised for it) a strong sustainment in the dutiful exertion of our physical energies, and Mr. Everard Romfrey experienced it after he had fulfilled his double office on the person of Dr. Shrapnel by carrying out his own decree. His conscience approved him cheerlessly, as it is the habit of that secret monitor to do when we have no particular advantage coming of the act we have performed; but the righteous labour of his arm gave him high breathing and an appetite.

He foresaw that he and Nevil would soon be having a wrestle over the matter, hand and thigh; but a gentleman in the right engaged with a fellow in the wrong has nothing to apprehend; is, in fact, in the position of a gamepreserver with a poacher. The nearest approach to gratification in that day's work which Mr. Romfrey knew was offered by the picture of Nevil's lamentable attitude above his dirty idol. He conceived it in the mock-mediæval style of our caricaturists:—Shrapnel stretched at his length, half a league, in slashed yellows and blacks, with his bauble beside him, and prodigious pointed toes; Nevil in parti-coloured tights, on one leg, raising his fists in imprecation to a nose in the firmament.

Gentlemen of an unpractised imaginative capacity cannot vision for themselves exactly what they would, being unable to exercise authority over the proportions and the hues of the objects they conceive, which are very much at the mercy of their sportive caprices; and the state of mind of Mr. Romfrey is not to be judged by his ridiculous view of the pair. In the abstract he could be sorry for Shrapnel. As he knew himself magnanimous, he promised himself to be forbearing with Nevil.

Moreover, the month of September was drawing nigh; he had plenty to think of. The entire land (signifying all

but all of those who occupy the situation of thinkers in it) may be said to have been exhaling the same thought in connection with September. Our England holds possession of a considerable portion of the globe, and it keeps the world in awe to see her bestowing so considerable a portion of her intelligence upon her recreations. To prosecute them with her whole heart is an ingenious exhibition of her power. Mr. Romfrey was of those who said to his countrymen, 'Go yachting; go cricketing; go boat-racing; go shooting; go horse-racing, nine months of the year, while the other Europeans go marching and drilling.' Those occupations he considered good for us; and our much talking, writing, and thinking about them characteristic, and therefore good. And he was not one of those who do penance for that sweating indolence in the fits of desperate panic. Beauchamp's argument that the rich idler begets the idling vagabond, the rich wagerer the brutal swindler, the general thirst for a mad round of recreation a generally-increasing disposition to avoid serious work, and the unbraced moral tone of the country an indifference to national responsibility (an argument doubtless extracted from Shrapnel, talk tall as the very demagogue when he stood upright), Mr. Romfrey laughed at scornfully, affirming that our manufactures could take care of themselves. As for invasion, we are circled by the sea. Providence has done that for us, and may be relied on to do more in an emergency.—The children of wealth and the children of the sun alike believe that Providence is for them, and it would seem that the former can do without it less than the latter, though the former are less inclined to give it personification.

This year, however, the array of armaments on the Continent made Mr. Romfrey anxious about our navy. Almost his first topic in welcoming Colonel Halkett and

Cecilia to Steynham was the rottenness of navy administration; for if Providence is to do anything for us it must have a sea-worthy fleet for the operation. How loudly would his contemptuous laughter have repudiated the charge that he trusted to supernatural agency for assistance in case of need! But so it was: and he owned to believing in English luck. Partly of course he meant that steady fire of combat which his countrymen have got heated to of old till fortune blessed them.

'Nevil is not here?' the colonel asked.

'No, I suspect he 's gruelling and plastering a doctor of his acquaintance,' Mr. Romfrey said, with his nasal laugh composed of scorn and resignation.

'Yes, yes, I 've heard,' said Colonel Halkett hastily.

He would have liked to be informed of Dr. Shrapnel's particular offence: he mentioned the execrable letter.

Mr. Romfrey complacently interjected: 'Drug-vomit!' and after an interval: 'Gallows!'

'That man has done Nevil Beauchamp a world of mischief, Romfrey.'

'We 'll hope for a cure, colonel.'

'Did the man come across you?'

'He did.'

Mr. Romfrey was mute on the subject. Colonel Halkett abstained from pushing his inquiries.

Cecilia could only tell her father when they were alone in the drawing-room a few minutes before dinner that Mrs. Culling was entirely ignorant of any cause to which Nevil's absence might be attributed.

'Mr. Romfrey had good cause,' the colonel said, emphatically.

He repeated it next day, without being a bit wiser of the cause.

Cecilia's happiness or hope was too sensitive to allow of a beloved father's deceiving her in his opposition to it.

She saw clearly now that he had fastened on this miserable incident, expecting an imbroglio that would divide Nevil and his uncle, and be an excuse for dividing her and Nevil. O for the passionate will to make head against what appeared as a fate in this matter! She had it not.

Mr. and Mrs. Wardour-Devereux, Sir John and Lady Baskelett, and the Countess of Welshpool, another sister of Mr. Romfrey's, arrived at Steynham for a day and a night. Lady Baskelett and Lady Welshpool came to see their brother, not to countenance his household; and Mr. Wardour-Devereux could not stay longer than a certain number of hours under a roof where tobacco was in evil odour. From her friend Louise, his wife, Cecilia learnt that Mr. Lydiard had been summoned to Dr. Shrapnel's bedside, as Mrs. Devereux knew by a letter she had received from Mr. Lydiard, who was no political devotee of that man, she assured Cecilia, but had an extraordinary admiration for the Miss Denham living with him. This was kindly intended to imply that Beauchamp was released from his attendance on Dr. Shrapnel, and also that it was not he whom the Miss Denham attracted.

'She is in Switzerland,' said Cecilia.

'She is better there,' said Mrs. Devereux.

Mr. Stukely Culbrett succeeded to these visitors. He heard of the case of Dr. Shrapnel from Colonel Halkett, and of Beauchamp's missing of his chance with the heiress from Mr. Romfrey.

Rosamund Culling was in great perplexity about Beauchamp's prolonged absence; for he had engaged to come, he had written to her to say he would be sure to come; and she feared he was ill. She would have persuaded Mr. Culbrett to go down to Bevisham to see him: she declared that she could even persuade herself to call on Dr. Shrapnel a second time, in spite of her horror of the man. Her anger at the thought of his keeping Nevil

away from good fortune and happiness caused her to speak in resentment and loathing of the man.

'He behaved badly when you saw him, did he?' said Stukely.

'Badly, is no word. He is detestable,' Rosamund replied.

'You think he ought to be whipped?'

She feigned an extremity of vindictiveness, and twisted her brows in comic apology for the unfeminine sentiment, as she said: 'I really do.'

The feminine gentleness of her character was known to Stukely, so she could afford to exaggerate the expression of her anger, and she did not modify it, forgetful that a woman is the representative of the sex with cynical men, and escapes from contempt at the cost of her sisterhood.

Looking out of an upper window in the afternoon she beheld Nevil Beauchamp in a group with his uncle Everard, the colonel and Cecilia, and Mr. Culbrett. Nevil was on his feet; the others were seated under the great tulip-tree on the lawn.

A little observation of them warned her that something was wrong. There was a vacant chair; Nevil took it in his hand at times, stamped it to the ground, walked away and sharply back fronting his uncle, speaking vehemently, she perceived, and vainly, as she judged by the cast of his uncle's figure. Mr. Romfrey's head was bent, and wagged slightly, as he screwed his brows up and shot his eyes queerly at the agitated young man. Colonel Halkett's arms crossed his chest. Cecilia's eyelids drooped their lashes. Mr. Culbrett was balancing on the hind-legs of his chair. No one appeared to be speaking but Nevil.

It became evident that Nevil was putting a series of questions to his uncle. Mechanical nods were given him in reply.

Presently Mr. Romfrey rose, thundering out a word or two, without a gesture.

Colonel Halkett rose.

Nevil flung his hand out straight to the house.

Mr. Romfrey seemed to consent; the colonel shook his head: Nevil insisted.

A footman carrying a tea-tray to Miss Halkett received some commission and swiftly disappeared, making Rosamund wonder whether sugar, milk or cream had been omitted.

She met him on the first landing, and heard that Mr. Romfrey requested her to step out on the lawn.

Expecting to hear of a piece of misconduct on the part of the household servants, she hurried forth, and found that she had to traverse the whole space of the lawn up to the tulip-tree. Colonel Halkett and Mr. Romfrey had resumed their seats. The colonel stood up and bowed to her.

Mr. Romfrey said: 'One question to you, ma'am, and you shall not be detained. Did not that man Shrapnel grossly insult you on the day you called on him to see Captain Beauchamp about a couple of months before the Election?'

'Look at me when you speak, ma'am,' said Beauchamp.

Rosamund looked at him.

The whiteness of his face paralyzed her tongue. A dreadful levelling of his eyes penetrated and chilled her. Instead of thinking of her answer she thought of what could possibly have happened.

'Did he insult you at all, ma'am?' said Beauchamp.

Mr. Romfrey reminded him that he was not a cross-examining criminal barrister.

They waited for her to speak.

She hesitated, coloured, betrayed confusion; her senses telling her of a catastrophe, her conscience accusing her as the origin of it.

'Did Dr. Shrapnel, to your belief, intentionally hurt

your feelings or your dignity?' said Beauchamp, and made the answer easier:

'Not intentionally, surely: not . . . I certainly do not accuse him.'

'Can you tell me you feel that he wounded you in the smallest degree? And if so, how? I ask you this, because he is anxious, if he lives, to apologize to you for any offence that he may have been guilty of: he was ignorant of it. I have his word for that, and his commands to me to bear it to you. I may tell you I have never known him injure the most feeble thing—anything alive, or wish to.'

Beauchamp's voice choked. Rosamund saw tears leap out of the stern face of her dearest now in wrath with her.

'Is he ill?' she faltered.

'He is. You own to a strong dislike of him, do you not?'

'But not to desire any harm to him.'

'Not a whipping,' Mr. Culbrett murmured.

Everard Romfrey overheard it.

He had allowed Mrs. Culling to be sent for, that she might with a bare affirmative silence Nevil, when his conduct was becoming intolerable before the guests of the house.

'That will do, ma'am,' he dismissed her.

Beauchamp would not let her depart.

'I must have your distinct reply, and in Mr. Romfrey's presence:—say, that if you accused him you were mistaken, or that they were mistaken who supposed you had accused him. I must have the answer before you go.'

'Sir, will you learn manners!' Mr. Romfrey said to him, with a rattle of the throat.

Beauchamp turned his face from her.

Colonel Halkett offered her his arm to lead her away.

'What is it? Oh, what is it?' she whispered, scarcely able to walk, but declining the colonel's arm.

'You ought not to have been dragged out here,' said he. 'Any one might have known there would be no convincing of Captain Beauchamp. That old rascal in Bevisham has been having a beating; that 's all. And a very beautiful day it is!—a little too hot, though. Before we leave, you must give me a lesson or two in gardening.'

'Dr. Shrapnel—Mr. Romfrey!' said Rosamund half audibly under the oppression of the more she saw than what she said.

The colonel talked of her renown in landscape-gardening. He added casually: 'They met the other day.'

'By accident?'

'By chance, I suppose. Shrapnel defends one of your Steynham poaching vermin.'

'Mr. Romfrey struck him?—for that? Oh, never!' Rosamund exclaimed.

'I suppose he had a long account to settle.'

She fetched her breath painfully. 'I shall never be forgiven.'

'And I say that a gentleman has no business with idols,' the colonel fumed as he spoke. 'Those letters of Shrapnel to Nevil Beauchamp are a scandal on the name of Englishman.'

'You have read that shocking one, Colonel Halkett?'

'Captain Baskelett read it out to us.'

'He? Oh! then . . .' She stopped:—Then the author of this mischief is clear to me! her divining hatred of Cecil would have said, but her humble position did not warrant such speech. A consideration of the lowliness necessitating this restraint at a moment when loudly to denounce another's infamy with triumphant insight would have solaced and supported her, kept Rosamund dumb.

She could not bear to think of her part in the mischief.

She was not bound to think of it, knowing actually nothing of the occurrence.

Still she felt that she was on her trial. She detected herself running in and out of her nature to fortify it against accusations rather than cleanse it for inspection. It was narrowing in her own sight. The prospect of her having to submit to a further interrogatory, shut it up entrenched in the declaration that Dr. Shrapnel had so far outraged her sentiments as to be said to have offended her: not insulted, perhaps, but certainly offended.

And this was a generous distinction. It was generous; and, having recognized the generosity, she was unable to go beyond it.

She was presently making the distinction to Miss Halkett. The colonel had left her at the door of the house: Miss Halkett sought admission to her private room on an errand of condolence, for she had sympathized with her very much in the semi-indignity Nevil had forced her to undergo: and very little indeed had she been able to sympathize with Nevil, who had been guilty of the serious fault of allowing himself to appear moved by his own commonplace utterances; or, in other words, the theme being hostile to his audience, he had betrayed emotion over it without first evoking the spirit of pathos.

'As for me,' Rosamund replied, to some comforting remarks of Miss Halkett's, 'I do not understand why I should be mixed up in Dr. Shrapnel's misfortunes: I really am quite unable to recollect his words to me or his behaviour: I have only a positive impression that I left his house, where I had gone to see Captain Beauchamp, in utter disgust, so repelled by his language that I could hardly trust myself to speak of the man to Mr. Romfrey when he questioned me. I did not volunteer it. I am ready to say that I believe Dr. Shrapnel did not intend to be insulting. I cannot say that he was not offensive.

You know, Miss Halkett, I would willingly, gladly have saved him from anything like punishment.'

'You are too gentle to have thought of it,' said Cecilia.

'But I shall never be forgiven by Captain Beauchamp. I see in his eyes that he accuses me and despises me.'

'He will not be so unjust, Mrs. Culling.'

Rosamund begged that she might hear what Nevil had first said on his arrival.

Cecilia related that they had seen him walking swiftly across the park, and that Mr. Romfrey had hailed him, and held his hand out; and that Captain Beauchamp had overlooked it, saying he feared Mr. Romfrey's work was complete. He had taken her father's hand and hers: and his touch was like ice.

'His worship of that Dr. Shrapnel is extraordinary,' quoth Rosamund. 'And how did Mr. Romfrey behave to him?'

'My father thinks, very forbearingly.'

Rosamund sighed and made a semblance of wringing her hands. 'It seems to me that I anticipated ever since I heard of the man . . . or at least ever since I saw him and heard him, he would be the evil genius of us all:—if I dare include myself. But I am not permitted to escape! And, Miss Halkett, can you tell me how it was that my name—that I became involved? I cannot imagine the circumstances which would bring me forward in this unhappy affair.'

Cecilia replied: 'The occasion was, that Captain Beauchamp so scornfully contrasted the sort of injury done by Dr. Shrapnel's defence of a poacher on his uncle's estate, with the severe chastisement inflicted by Mr. Romfrey in revenge for it. He would not leave the subject.'

'I see him—see his eyes!' cried Rosamund, her bosom heaving and sinking deep, as her conscience quavered within her. 'At last Mr. Romfrey mentioned me?'

'He stood up and said you had been personally insulted by Dr. Shrapnel.'

Rosamund meditated in a distressing doubt of her conscientious truthfulness.

'Captain Beauchamp will be coming to me; and how can I answer him? Heaven knows I would have shielded the poor man, if possible—poor wretch! Wicked though he is, one has only to hear of him suffering! But what can I answer? I do recollect now that Mr. Romfrey compelled me from question to question to confess that the man had vexed me. Insulted, I never said. At the worst, I said vexed. I would not have said insulted, or even offended, because Mr. Romfrey . . . ah! we know him. What I did say, I forget. I have no guide to what I said but my present feelings, and they are pity for the unfortunate man much more than dislike.—Well, I must go through the scene with Nevil!' Rosamund concluded her outcry of ostensible exculpation.

She asked in a cooler moment how it was that Captain Beauchamp had so far forgotten himself as to burst out on his uncle before the guests of the house. It appeared that he had wished his uncle to withdraw with him, and Mr. Romfrey had bidden him postpone private communications. Rosamund gathered from one or two words of Cecilia's that Mr. Romfrey, until finally stung by Nevil, had indulged in his best-humoured banter.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE FACE OF RENÉE

Shortly before the ringing of the dinner-bell Rosamund knocked at Beauchamp's dressing-room door, the bearer of a telegram from Bevisham. He read it in one swift

run of the eyes, and said: 'Come in, ma'am, I have something for you. Madame de Rouaillout sends you this.'

Rosamund saw her name written in a French hand on the back of the card.

'You stay with us, Nevil?'

'To-night and to-morrow, perhaps. The danger seems to be over.'

'Has Dr. Shrapnel been in danger?'

'He has. If it 's quite over now!'

'I declare to you, Nevil . . .'

'Listen to me, ma'am; I 'm in the dark about this murderous business:—an old man, defenceless, harmless as a child!—but I know this, that you are somewhere in it.'

'Nevil, do you not guess at some one else?'

'He! yes, he! But Cecil Baskelett led no blind man to Dr. Shrapnel's gate.'

'Nevil, as I live, I knew nothing of it!'

'No, but you set fire to the train. You hated the old man, and you taught Mr. Romfrey to think that you had been insulted. I see it all. Now you must have the courage to tell him of your error. There 's no other course for you. I mean to take Mr. Romfrey to Dr. Shrapnel, to save the honour of our family, as far as it can be saved.'

'What? Nevil!' exclaimed Rosamund, gaping.

'It seems little enough, ma'am. But he must go. I will have the apology spoken, and man to man.'

'But you would never tell your uncle that?'

He laughed in his uncle's manner.

'But, Nevil, my dearest, forgive me, I think of you—why are the Halketts here? It is not entirely with Colonel Halkett's consent. It is your uncle's influence with him that gives you your chance. Do you not care

to avail yourself of it? Ever since he heard Dr. Shrapnel's letter to you, Colonel Halkett has, I am sure, been tempted to confound you with him in his mind:—ah! Nevil, but recollect that it is *only* Mr. Romfrey who can help to give you your Cecilia. There is no dispensing with him. Postpone your attempt to humiliate—I mean, that is, Oh! Nevil, whatever you intend to do to overcome your uncle, trust to time, be friends with him; be a little worldly! for her sake! to ensure her happiness!'

Beauchamp obtained the information that his cousin Cecil had read out the letter of Dr. Shrapnel at Mount Laurels.

The bell rang.

'Do you imagine I should sit at my uncle's table if I did not intend to force him to repair the wrong he has done to himself and to us?' he said.

'Oh! Nevil, do you not see Captain Baskelett at work here?'

'What amends can Cecil Baskelett make? My uncle is a man of honour: it is in his power. There, I leave you to speak to him; you will do it to-night, after we break up in the drawing-room.'

Rosamund groaned: 'An apology to Dr. Shrapnel from Mr. Romfrey! It is an impossibility, Nevil! utter!'

'So you say to sit idle: but do as I tell you.'

He went downstairs.

He had barely reproached her. She wondered at that; and then remembered his alien sad half-smile in quitting the room.

Rosamund would not present herself at her lord's dinner-table when there were any guests at Steynham. She prepared to receive Miss Halkett in the drawing-room, as the guests of the house this evening chanced to be her friends.

Madame de Rouaillout's present to her was a photograph of M. de Croisnel, his daughter and son in a group. Rosamund could not bear to look at the face of Renée, and she put it out of sight. But she had looked. She was reduced to look again.

Roland stood beside his father's chair; Renée sat at his feet, clasping his right hand. M. de Croisnel's fallen eyelids and unshorn white chin told the story of the family reunion. He was dying: his two children were nursing him to the end.

Decidedly Cecilia was a more beautiful woman than Renée: but on which does the eye linger longest—which draws the heart? a radiant landscape, where the tall ripe wheat flashes between shadow and shine in the stately march of Summer, or the peep into dewy woodland on to dark water?

Dark-eyed Renée was not beauty but attraction; she touched the double chords within us which are we know not whether harmony or discord, but a divine discord if an uncertified harmony, memorable beyond plain sweetness or majesty. There are touches of bliss in anguish that superhumanize bliss, touches of mystery in simplicity, of the eternal in the variable. These two chords of poignant antiphony she struck throughout the range of the hearts of men, and strangely intervolved them in vibrating unison. Only to look at her face, without hearing her voice, without the charm of her speech, was to feel it. On Cecilia's entering the drawing-room sola, while the gentlemen drank claret, Rosamund handed her the card of the photographic artist of Tours, mentioning no names.

'I should say the portrait is correct. A want of spirituality,' Rosamund said critically, using one of the insular commonplaces, after that manner of fastening upon what there is *not* in a piece of Art or nature.

Cecilia's avidity to see and study the face preserved her at a higher mark.

She knew the person instantly; had no occasion to ask who this was. She sat over the portrait blushing burningly: 'And that is a brother?' she said.

'That is her brother Roland, and very like her, except in complexion,' said Rosamund.

Cecilia murmured of a general resemblance in the features. Renée enchained her. Though but a sun-shadow, the vividness of this French face came out surprisingly; air was in the nostrils and speech flew from the tremulous mouth. The eyes? were they quivering with internal light, or were they set to seem so in the sensitive strange curves of the eyelids whose awakened lashes appeared to tremble on some borderland between lustreful significance and the mists? She caught at the nerves like certain aoristic combinations in music, like tones of a stringed instrument swept by the wind, enticing, unseizable. Yet she sat there at her father's feet gazing out into the world indifferent to spectators, indifferent even to the common sentiment of gracefulness. Her left hand clasped his right, and she supported herself on the floor with the other hand leaning away from him, to the destruction of conventional symmetry in the picture. None but a woman of consummate breeding dared have done as she did. It was not Southern suppleness that saved her from the charge of harsh audacity, but something of the kind of genius in her mood which has hurried the greater poets of sound and speech to impose their naturalness upon accepted laws, or show the laws to have been our meagre limitations.

The writer in this country will, however, be made safest, and the excellent body of self-appointed thongmen, who walk up and down our ranks flapping their leathern straps to terrorize us from experiments in imagery, will

best be satisfied, by the statement that she was indescribable: a term that exacts no labour of mind from him or from them, for it flows off the pen as readily as it fills a vacuum.

That posture of Renée displeased Cecilia and fascinated her. In an exhibition of paintings she would have passed by it in pure displeasure: but here was Nevil's first love, the woman who loved him; and she was French. After a continued study of her Cecilia's growing jealousy betrayed itself in a conscious rivalry of race, coming to the admission that Englishwomen cannot fling themselves about on the floor without agonizing the graces: possibly, too, they cannot look singularly without risks in the direction of slyness and brazen archness; or talk animatedly without dipping in slang. Conventional situations preserve them and interchange dignity with them; still life befits them; pre-eminently that judicial seat from which in briefest speech they deliver their judgements upon their foreign sisters. Jealousy it was that plucked Cecilia from her majestic place and caused her to envy in Renée things she would otherwise have disapproved.

At last she had seen the French lady's likeness! The effect of it was a horrid trouble in Cecilia's cool blood, abasement, a sense of eclipse, hardly any sense of deserving worthiness:—'What am I but an heiress!' Nevil had once called her beautiful; his praise had given her beauty. But what is beauty when it is outshone! Ask the owners of gems. You think them rich; they are pining.

Then, too, this Renée, who looked electrical in repose, might really love Nevil with a love that sent her heart out to him in his enterprises, justifying and adoring him, piercing to the hero in his very thoughts. Would she not see that his championship of the unfortunate man Dr. Shrapnel was heroic?

Cecilia surrendered the card to Rosamund, and it was out of sight when Beauchamp stepped in the drawing-room. His cheeks were flushed; he had been one against three for the better part of an hour.

'Are you going to show me the downs to-morrow morning?' Cecilia said to him; and he replied, 'You will have to be up early.'

'What 's that?' asked the colonel, at Beauchamp's heels.

He was volunteering to join the party of two for the early morning's ride to the downs. Mr. Romfrey pressed his shoulder, saying, 'There 's no third horse can do it in my stables.'

Colonel Halkett turned to him.

'I had your promise to come over the kennels with me and see how I treat a cry of mad dog, which is ninety-nine times out of a hundred mad fool man,' Mr. Romfrey added.

By that the colonel knew he meant to stand by Nevil still and offer him his chance of winning Cecilia.

Having pledged his word not to interfere, Colonel Halkett submitted, and muttered, 'Ah! the kennels.' Considering however what he had been witnessing of Nevil's behaviour to his uncle, the colonel was amazed at Mr. Romfrey's magnanimity in not cutting him off and disowning him.

'Why the downs?' he said.

'Why the deuce, colonel?' A question quite as reasonable, and Mr. Romfrey laughed under his breath. To relieve an uncertainty in Cecilia's face, that might soon have become confusion, he described the downs fronting the paleness of earliest dawn, and then their arch and curve and dip against the pearly grey of the half-glow; and then, among their hollows, lo, the illumination of the East all around, and up and away, and a gallop for miles

along the turfy thymy rolling billows, land to left, sea to right, below you. 'It 's the nearest hit to wings we can make, Cecilia.' He surprised her with her Christian name, which kindled in her the secret of something he expected from that ride on the downs.—Compare you the Alps with them? If you could jump on the back of an eagle, you might. The Alps have height. But the downs have swiftness. Those long stretching lines of the downs are greyhounds in full career. To look at them is to set the blood racing! Speed is on the downs, glorious motion, odorous air of sea and herb, exquisite as in the isles of Greece. And the Continental travelling ninnies leave England for health!—run off and forth from the downs to the steamboat, the railway, the steaming hotel, the tourist's shivering mountain-top, in search of sensations! There on the downs the finest and liveliest are at their bidding ready to fly through them like hosts of angels.

He spoke somewhat in that strain, either to relieve Cecilia or prepare the road for Nevil, not in his ordinary style; on the contrary, with a swing of enthusiasm that seemed to spring of ancient heartfelt fervours. And indeed soon afterward he was telling her that there on those downs, in full view of Steynham, he and his wife had first joined hands.

Beauchamp sat silent. Mr. Romfrey despatched orders to the stables, and Rosamund to the kitchen. Cecilia was rather dismayed by the formal preparations for the ride. She declined the early cup of coffee. Mr. Romfrey begged her to take it. 'Who knows the hour when you 'll be back?' he said. Beauchamp said nothing.

The room grew insufferable to Cecilia. She would have liked to be wafted to her chamber in a veil, so shamefully unveiled did she seem to be. But the French lady would have been happy in her place! Her father kissed her as

fathers do when they hand the bride into the travelling-carriage. His 'Good-night, my darling!' was in the voice of a soldier on duty. For a concluding sign that her dim apprehensions pointed correctly, Mr. Romfrey kissed her on the forehead. She could not understand how it had come to pass that she found herself suddenly on this incline, precipitated whither she would fain be going, only less hurriedly, less openly, and with her secret merely peeping, like a dove in the breast.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE RIDE IN THE WRONG DIRECTION

That pure opaque of the line of downs ran luminously edged against the pearly morning sky, with its dark landward face crepusculine yet clear in every combe, every dotting copse and furze-bush, every wavy fall, and the ripple, crease, and rill-like descent of the turf. Beauty of darkness was there, as well as beauty of light above.

Beauchamp and Cecilia rode forth before the sun was over the line, while the West and North-west sides of the rolling downs were stamped with such firmness of dusky feature as you see on the indentations of a shield of tarnished silver. The mounting of the sun behind threw an obscurer gloom, and gradually a black mask overcame them, until the rays shot among their folds and windings, and shadows rich as the black pansy, steady as on a dial-plate rounded with the hour.

Mr. Everard Romfrey embraced this view from Steynham windows, and loved it. The lengths of gigantic 'greyhound backs' coursing along the South were his vision of delight; no image of repose for him, but of the

life in swiftness. He had known them when the great bird of the downs was not a mere tradition, and though he owned conscientiously to never having beheld the bird, a certain mystery of holiness hung about the region where the bird had been in his time. There, too, with a timely word he had gained a wealthy and good wife. He had now sent Nevil to do the same.

This astute gentleman had caught at the idea of a ride of the young couple to the downs with his customary alacrity of perception as being the very best arrangement for hurrying them to the point. At Steynham Nevil was sure to be howling all day over his tumbled joss Shrapnel. Once away in the heart of the downs, and Cecilia beside him, it was a matter of calculation that two or three hours of the sharpening air would screw his human nature to the pitch. In fact, unless each of them was reluctant, they could hardly return unbetrothed. Cecilia's consent was foreshadowed by her submission in going: Mr. Romfrey had noticed her fright at the suggestive formalities he cast round the expedition, and felt sure of her. Taking Nevil for a man who could smell the perfume of a ripe affirmative on the sweetest of lips, he was pretty well sure of him likewise. And then a truce to all that Radical rageing and hot-pokering of the country! and lie in peace, old Shrapnel! and get on your legs when you can, and offend no more; especially be mindful not to let fly one word against a woman! With Cecilia for wife, and a year of marriage devoted to a son and heir, Nevil might be expected to resume his duties as a naval officer, and win an honourable name for the inheritance of the young one he kissed.

There was benevolence in these previsions of Mr. Romfrey, proving how good it is for us to bow to despotic authority, if only we will bring ourselves unquestioningly to accept the previous deeds of the directing hand.

Colonel Halkett gave up his daughter for lost when she did not appear at the breakfast-table: for yet more decidedly lost when the luncheon saw her empty place; and as time drew on toward the dinner-hour, he began to think her lost beyond hope, embarked for good and all with the madbrain. Some little hope of a dissension between the pair, arising from the natural antagonism of her strong sense to Nevil's extravagance, had buoyed him until it was evident that they must have alighted at an inn to eat, which signified that they had overleaped the world and its hurdles, and were as dreamy a leash of lovers as ever made a dreamland of hard earth. The downs looked like dreamland through the long afternoon. They shone as in a veil of silk—softly fair, softly dark. No spot of harshness was on them save where a quarry South-westward gaped at the evening sun.

Red light struck into that round chalk maw, and the green slopes and channels and half-circle hollows were brought a mile-stride nigher Steynham by the level beams.

The poor old colonel fell to a more frequent repetition of the 'Well!' with which he had been unconsciously expressing his perplexed mind in the kennels and through the covers during the day. None of the gentlemen went to dress. Mr. Culbrett was indoors conversing with Rosamund Culling.

'What 's come to them?' the colonel asked of Mr. Romfrey, who said shrugging, 'Something wrong with one of the horses.' It had happened to him on one occasion to set foot in the hole of a baked hedgehog that had furnished a repast, not without succulence, to some shepherd of the downs. Such a case might have recurred; it was more likely to cause an upset at a walk than at a gallop: or perhaps a shoe had been cast; and young people break no bones at a walking fall; ten to one if they

do at their top speed. Horses manage to kill their seniors for them: the young are exempt from accident.

Colonel Halkett nodded and sighed: 'I daresay they 're safe. It 's that man Shrapnel's letter—that letter, Romfrey! A private letter, I know; but I 've not heard Nevil disown the opinions expressed in it. I submit. It 's no use resisting. I treat my daughter as a woman capable of judging for herself. I repeat, I submit. I haven't a word against Nevil except on the score of his politics. I like him. All I have to say is, I don't approve of a republican and a sceptic for my son-in-law. I yield to you, and my daughter, if she . . .!'

'I think she does, colonel. Marriage 'll cure the fellow. Nevil will slough his craze. Off! old coat. Cissy will drive him in strings. "My wife!" I hear him.' Mr. Romfrey laughed quietly. 'It 's all "my country," now. The dog 'll be uxorious. He wants fixing; nothing worse.'

'How he goes on about Shrapnel!'

'I shouldn't think much of him if he didn't.'

'You 're one in a thousand, Romfrey. I object to seeing a man worshipped.'

'It 's Nevil's green-sickness, and Shrapnel 's the god of it.'

'I trust to heaven you 're right. It seems to me young fellows ought to be out of it earlier.'

'They generally are.' Mr. Romfrey named some of the processes by which they are relieved of brain-flightiness, adding philosophically, 'This way or that.'

His quick ear caught a sound of hoofs cantering down the avenue on the Northern front of the house.

He consulted his watch. 'Ten minutes to eight. Say a quarter-past for dinner. They 're here, colonel.'

Mr. Romfrey met Nevil returning from the stables. Cecilia had disappeared.

'Had a good day?' said Mr. Romfrey.

Beauchamp replied: 'I 'll tell you of it after dinner,' and passed by him.

Mr. Romfrey edged round to Colonel Halkett, conjecturing in his mind: They have not hit it; as he remarked: 'Breakfast and luncheon have been omitted in this day's fare,' which appeared to the colonel a confirmation of his worst fears, or rather the extinction of his last spark of hope.

He knocked at his daughter's door in going upstairs to dress.

Cecilia presented herself and kissed him.

'Well?' said he.

'By-and-by, papa,' she answered. 'I have a headache. Beg Mr. Romfrey to excuse me.'

'No news for me?'

She had no news.

Mrs. Culling was with her. The colonel stepped on mystified to his room.

When the door had closed Cecilia turned to Rosamund and burst into tears. Rosamund felt that it must be something grave indeed for the proud young lady so to betray a troubled spirit.

'He is ill—Dr. Shrapnel is very ill,' Cecilia responded to one or two subdued inquiries in as clear a voice as she could command.

'Where have you heard of him?' Rosamund asked.

'We have been there.'

'Bevisham? to Bevisham?' Rosamund was considering the opinion Mr. Romfrey would form of the matter from the point of view of his horses.

'It was Nevil's wish,' said Cecilia.

'Yes? and you went with him,' Rosamund encouraged her to proceed, gladdened at hearing her speak of Nevil by that name; 'you have not been on the downs at all?'

Cecilia mentioned a junction railway station they had ridden to; and thence, boxing the horses, by train to Bevisham. Rosamund understood that some haunting anxiety had fretted Nevil during the night; in the morning he could not withstand it, and he begged Cecilia to change their destination, apparently with a vehemence of entreaty that had been irresistible, or else it was utter affection for him had reduced her to undertake the distasteful journey. She admitted that she was not the most sympathetic companion Nevil could have had on the way, either going or coming. She had not entered Dr. Shrapnel's cottage. Remaining on horseback she had seen the poor man reclining in his garden chair. Mr. Lydiard was with him, and also his ward Miss Denham, who had been summoned by telegraph by one of the servants from Switzerland. And Cecilia had heard Nevil speak of his uncle to her, and too humbly, she hinted. Nor had the expression of Miss Denham's countenance in listening to him pleased her; but it was true that a heavily burdened heart cannot be expected to look pleasing. On the way home Cecilia had been compelled in some degree to defend Mr. Romfrey. Blushing through her tears at the remembrance of a past emotion that had been mixed with foresight, she confessed to Rosamund she thought it now too late to prevent a rupture between Nevil and his uncle. Had some one whom Nevil trusted and cared for taken counsel with him and advised him before uncle and nephew met to discuss this most unhappy matter, then there might have been hope. As it was, the fate of Dr. Shrapnel had gained entire possession of Nevil. Every retort of his uncle's in reference to it rose up in him: he used language of contempt neighbouring abhorrence: he stipulated for one sole thing to win back his esteem for his uncle; and that was, the apology to Dr. Shrapnel.

'And to-night,' Cecilia concluded, 'he will request

Mr. Romfrey to accompany him to Bevisham to-morrow morning, to make the apology in person. He will not accept the slightest evasion. He thinks Dr. Shrapnel may die, and the honour of the family—what is it he says of it?' Cecilia raised her eyes to the ceiling, while Rosamund blinked in impatience and grief, just apprehending the alien state of the young lady's mind in her absence of recollection, as well as her bondage in the effort to recollect accurately.

'Have you not eaten any food to-day, Miss Halkett?' she said; for it might be the want of food which had broken her and changed her manner.

Cecilia replied that she had ridden for an hour to Mount Laurels.

'Alone? Mr. Romfrey must not hear of that,' said Rosamund.

Cecilia consented to lie down on her bed. She declined the dainties Rosamund pressed on her. She was feverish with a deep and unconcealed affliction, and behaved as if her pride had gone. But if her pride had gone she would have eased her heart by sobbing outright. A similar division harassed her as when her friend Nevil was the candidate for Bevisham. She condemned his extreme wrath with his uncle, yet was attracted and enchained by the fire of passionate attachment which aroused it: and she was conscious that she had but shown obedience to his wishes throughout the day, not sympathy with his feelings. Under cover of a patient desire to please she had nursed irritation and jealousy; the degradation of the sense of jealousy increasing the irritation. Having consented to the ride to Dr. Shrapnel, should she not, to be consistent, have dismounted there? O half heart! A whole one, though it be an erring, like that of the French lady, does at least live, and has a history, and makes music: but the faint and uncertain is jarred in action,

jarred in memory, ever behind the day and in the shadow of it! Cecilia reviewed herself: jealous, disappointed, vexed, ashamed, she had been all day a graceless companion, a bad actress: and at the day's close she was loving Nevil the better for what had dissatisfied, distressed, and wounded her. She was loving him in emulation of his devotedness to another person: and that other was a revolutionary common people's doctor! an infidel, a traitor to his country's dearest interests! But Nevil loved him, and it had become impossible for her not to covet the love, or to think of the old offender without the halo cast by Nevil's attachment being upon him. So intensely was she moved by her intertwisting reflections that in an access of bodily fever she stood up and moved before the glass, to behold the image of the woman who could be the victim of these childish emotions: and no wonderful contrast struck her eyes; she appeared to herself as poor and small as they. How could she aspire to a man like Nevil Beauchamp? If he had made her happy by wooing her she would not have adored him as she did now. He likes my hair, she said, smoothing it out, and then pressing her temples, like one insane. Two minutes afterward she was telling Rosamund her head ached less.

'This terrible Dr. Shrapnel!' Rosamund exclaimed, but reported that no loud voices were raised in the dining-room.

Colonel Halkett came to see his daughter, full of anxiety and curiosity. Affairs had been peaceful below, for he was ignorant of the expedition to Bevisham. On hearing of it he frowned, questioned Cecilia as to whether she had set foot on that man's grounds, then said: 'Ah! well, we leave to-morrow: I must go, I have business at home; I can't delay it. I sanctioned no calling there, nothing of the kind. From Steynham to Bevisham? Goodness, it 's rank madness. I 'm not astonished you 're sick and ill.'

He waited till he was assured Cecilia had no special matter to relate, and recommending her to drink the tea Mrs. Culling had made for her, and then go to bed and sleep, he went down to the drawing-room, charged with the worst form of hostility toward Nevil, the partly diplomatic.

Cecilia smiled at her father's mention of sleep. She was in the contest of the two men, however inanimately she might be lying overhead, and the assurance in her mind that neither of them would give ground, so similar were they in their tenacity of will, dissimilar in all else, dragged her this way and that till she swayed lifeless between them. One may be as a weed of the sea while one's fate is being decided. To love is to be on the sea, out of sight of land: to love a man like Nevil Beauchamp is to be on the sea in tempest. Still to persist in loving would be noble, and but for this humiliation of utter helplessness an enviable power. Her thoughts ran thus in shame and yearning and regret, dimly discerning where her heart failed in the strength which was Nevil's, though it was a full heart, faithful and not void of courage. But *he* never brooded, he never blushed from insufficiency—the faintness of a desire, the callow passion that cannot fly and feed itself: he never tottered; he walked straight to his mark. She set up his image and Reneé's, and cowered under the heroical shapes till she felt almost extinct. With her weak limbs and head worthlessly paining, the little infantile I within her ceased to wail, dwindled beyond sensation. Rosamund, waiting on her in the place of her maid, saw two big drops come through her closed eyelids, and thought that if it could be granted to Nevil to look for a moment on this fair and proud young lady's loveliness in abandonment, it would tame, melt, and save him. The Gods presiding over custom do not permit such renovating sights to men.

CHAPTER XXXVI

PURSUIT OF THE APOLOGY OF MR. ROMFREY TO DR. SHRAPNEL

The contest, which was an alternation of hard hitting and close wrestling, had recommenced when Colonel Halkett stepped into the drawing-room.

'Colonel, I find they 've been galloping to Bevisham and back,' said Mr. Romfrey.

'I 've heard of it,' the colonel replied. Not perceiving a sign of dissatisfaction on his friend's face, he continued: 'To that man Shrapnel.'

'Cecilia did not dismount,' said Beauchamp.

'You took her to that man's gate. It was not with my sanction. You know my ideas of the man.'

'If you were to see him now, colonel, I don't think you would speak harshly of him.'

'We 're not obliged to go and look on men who have had their measure dealt them.'

'Barbarously,' said Beauchamp.

Mr. Romfrey in the most placid manner took a chair. 'Windy talk, that!' he said.

Colonel Halkett seated himself. Stukely Culbrett turned a sheet of manuscript he was reading.

Beauchamp began a caged lion's walk on the rug under the mantelpiece.

'I shall not spare you from hearing what I think of it, sir.'

'We 've had what you think of it twice over,' said Mr. Romfrey. 'I suppose it was the first time for information, the second time for emphasis, and the rest counts to keep it alive in your recollection.'

'This is what you have to take to heart, sir; that Dr. Shrapnel is now seriously ill.'

'I 'm sorry for it, and I 'll pay the doctor's bill.'

'You make it hard for me to treat you with respect.'

'Fire away. Those Radical friends of yours have to learn a lesson, and it 's worth a purse to teach them that a lady, however feeble she may seem to them, is exactly of the strength of the best man of her acquaintance.'

'That 's well said!' came from Colonel Halkett.

Beauchamp stared at him, amazed by the commendation of empty language.

'You acted in error; barbarously, but in error,' he addressed his uncle.

'And you have got a fine topic for mouthing,' Mr. Romfrey rejoined.

'You mean to sit still under Dr. Shrapnel's forgiveness?'

'He 's taken to copy the Christian religion, has he?'

'You know you were deluded when you struck him.'

'Not a whit.'

'Yes, you know it now: Mrs. Culling——'

'Drag in no woman, Nevil Beauchamp!'

'She has confessed to you that Dr. Shrapnel neither insulted her nor meant to ruffle her.'

'She has done no such nonsense.'

'If she has not!—but I trust her to have done it.'

'You play the trumpeter, you terrorize her.'

'Into opening her lips wider; nothing else. I 'll have the truth from her, and no mincing: and from Cecil Baskelett and Palmet.'

'Give Cecil a second licking, if you can, and have him off to Shrapnel.'

'You!' cried Beauchamp.

At this juncture Stukely Culbrett closed the manuscript in his hands, and holding it out to Beauchamp, said:

'Here 's your letter, Nevil. It 's tolerably hard to decipher. It 's mild enough; it 's middling good pulpit. I like it.'

'What have you got there?' Colonel Halkett asked him.

'A letter of his friend Dr. Shrapnel on the Country. Read a bit, colonel.'

'I? That letter! Mild, do you call it?' The colonel started back his chair in declining to touch the letter.

'Try it,' said Stukely. 'It 's the letter they have been making the noise about. It ought to be printed. There 's a hit or two at the middle-class that I should like to see in print. It 's really not bad pulpit; and I suspect that what you object to, colonel, is only the dust of a well-thumped cushion. Shrapnel thumps with his fist. He doesn't say much that 's new. If the parsons were men they 'd be saying it every Sunday. If they did, colonel, I should hear you saying, amen.'

'Wait till they do say it.'

'That 's a long stretch. They 're turncocks of one Water-company—to wash the greasy citizens!'

'You 're keeping Nevil on the gape,' said Mr. Romfrey, with a whimsical shrewd cast of the eye at Beauchamp, who stood alert not to be foiled, arrow-like in look and readiness to repeat his home-shot. Mr. Romfrey wanted to hear more of that unintelligible 'You!' of Beauchamp's. But Stukely Culbrett intended that the latter should be foiled, and he continued his diversion from the angry subject.

'We 'll drop the sacerdotals,' he said. 'They 're behind a veil for us, and so are we for them. I 'm with you, colonel; I wouldn't have them persecuted; they sting fearfully when whipped. No one listens to them now except the class that goes to sleep under them, to "set an

example" to the class that can't understand them. Shrapnel is like the breeze shaking the turf-grass outside the churchdoors; a trifle fresher. He knocks nothing down.'

'He can't!' ejaculated the colonel.

'He sermonizes to shake, that 's all. I know the kind of man.'

'Thank heaven, it 's not a common species in England!'

'Common enough to be classed.'

Beauchamp struck through the conversation of the pair: 'Can I see you alone to-night, sir, or to-morrow morning?'

'You may catch me where you can,' was Mr. Romfrey's answer.

'Where 's that? It 's for your sake and mine, not for Dr. Shrapnel's. I have to speak to you, and must. You have done your worst with him; you can't undo it. You have to think of your honour as a gentleman. I intend to treat you with respect, but wolf is the title now, whether I say it or not.'

'Shrapnel's a rather long-legged sheep?'

'He asks for nothing from you.'

'He would have got nothing, at a cry of peccavi!'

'He was innocent, perfectly blameless; he would not lie to save himself. You mistook that for—but you were an engine shot along a line of rails. He does you the justice to say you acted in error.'

'And you 're his parrot.'

'He pardons you.'

'Ha! t' other cheek!'

'You went on that brute 's errand in ignorance. Will you keep to the character now you know the truth? Hesitation about it doubles the infamy. An old man! the best of men! the kindest and truest! the most unselfish!'

'He tops me by half a head, and he 's my junior.'

Beauchamp suffered himself to give out a groan of sick derision: 'Ah!'

'And it was no joke holding him tight,' said Mr. Romfrey, 'I 'd as lief snap an ash. The fellow (he leaned round to Colonel Halkett) must be a fellow of a fine constitution. And he took his punishment like a man. I 've known worse: and far worse: gentlemen by birth. There 's the choice of taking it upright or fighting like a rabbit with a weasel in his hole. Leave him to think it over, he 'll come right. I think no harm of him, I 've no animus. A man must have his lesson at some time of life. I did what I had to do.'

'Look here, Nevil,' Stukely Culbrett checked Beauchamp in season: 'I beg to inquire what Dr. Shrapnel means by "the people." We have in our country the nobles and the squires, and after them, as I understand it, the people: that 's to say, the middle-class and the working-class—fat and lean. I 'm quite with Shrapnel when he lashes the fleshpots. They want it, and they don't get it from "their organ," the Press. I fancy you and I agree about their organ; the dismallest organ that ever ground a hackneyed set of songs and hymns to madden the thoroughfares.'

'The Press of our country!' interjected Colonel Halkett in moaning parenthesis.

'It 's the week-day Parson of the middle-class, colonel. They have their thinking done for them as the Chinese have their dancing. But, Nevil, your Dr. Shrapnel seems to treat the traders as identical with the aristocracy in opposition to his "people." The traders are the cursed middlemen, bad friends of the "people," and infernally treacherous to the nobles till money hoists them. It 's they who pull down the country. They hold up the nobles to the hatred of the democracy, and the democracy

to scare the nobles. One 's when they want to swallow a privilege, and the other 's when they want to ring-fence their gains. How is it Shrapnel doesn't expose the trick? He must see through it. I like that letter of his. People is one of your Radical big words that burst at a query. He can't mean Quince, and Bottom, and Starveling, Christopher Sly, Jack Cade, Caliban, and poor old Hodge? No, no, Nevil. Our clowns are the stupidest in Europe. They can't cook their meals. They can't spell; they can scarcely speak. They haven't a jig in their legs. And I believe they 're losing their grin! They 're nasty when their blood 's up. Shakespeare's Cade tells you what he thought of Radicalizing the people. "And as for your mother, I 'll make her a duke"; that 's one of their songs. The word people, in England, is a dyspeptic agitator's dream when he falls nodding over the red chapter of French history. Who won the great liberties for England? My book says, the nobles. And who made the great stand later?—the squires. What have the middlemen done but bid for the people they despise and fear, dishonour us abroad and make a hash of us at home? Shrapnel sees that. Only he has got the word people in his mouth. The people of England, my dear fellow, want *heading*. Since the traders obtained power we have been a country on all fours. Of course Shrapnel sees it: I say so. But talk to him and teach him where to look for the rescue.'

Colonel Halkett said to Stukely: 'If you have had a clear idea in what you have just spoken, my head 's no place for it!'

Stukely's unusually lengthy observations had somewhat heated him, and he protested with earnestness: 'It was pure Tory, my dear colonel.'

But the habitually and professedly cynical should not deliver themselves at length: for as soon as they miss their customary incision of speech they are apt to aim to

recover it in loquacity, and thus it may be that the survey of their ideas becomes disordered.

Mr. Culbrett endangered his reputation for epigram in a good cause, it shall be said.

These interruptions were torture to Beauchamp. Nevertheless the end was gained. He sank into a chair silent.

Mr. Romfrey wished to have it out with his nephew, of whose comic appearance as a man full of thunder, and occasionally rattling, yet all the while trying to be decorous and politic, he was getting tired. He foresaw that a tussle between them in private would possibly be too hot for his temper, admirably under control though it was.

'Why not drag Cecil to Shrapnel?' he said, for a provocation.

Beauchamp would not be goaded.

Colonel Halkett remarked that he would have to leave Steynham the next day. His host remonstrated with him. The colonel said: 'Early.' He had very particular business at home. He was positive, and declined every inducement to stay. Mr. Romfrey glanced at Nevil, thinking, You poor fool! And then he determined to let the fellow have five minutes alone with him.

This occurred at midnight, in that half-armoury, half-library, which was his private room.

Rosamund heard their voices below. She cried out to herself that it was her doing, and blamed her beloved, and her master, and Dr. Shrapnel, in the breath of her self-recrimination. The demagogue, the over-punctilious gentleman, the faint lover, surely it must be reason wanting in the three for each of them in turn to lead the other, by an excess of some sort of the quality constituting their men's natures, to wreck a calm life and stand in contention! Had Shrapnel been commonly reasonable he would have apologized to Mr. Romfrey, or had Mr. Romfrey, he would not have resorted to force to punish the supposed

offender, or had Nevil, he would have held his peace until he had gained his bride. As it was, the folly of the three knocked at her heart, uniting to bring the heavy accusation against one poor woman, quite in the old way: the Who is she? of the mocking Spaniard at mention of a social catastrophe. Rosamund had a great deal of the pride of her sex, and she resented any slur on it. She felt almost superciliously toward Mr. Romfrey and Nevil for their not taking hands to denounce the plotter, Cecil Baskelett. They seemed a pair of victims to him, nearly as much so as the wretched man Shrapnel. It was their senselessness which made her guilty! And simply because she had uttered two or three exclamations of dislike of a revolutionary and infidel she was compelled to groan under her present oppression! Is there anything to be hoped of men? Rosamund thought bitterly of Nevil's idea of their progress. Heaven help them! But the unhappy creatures have ceased to look to a heaven for help.

We see the consequence of it in this Shrapnel complication.

Three men: and one struck down; the other defeated in his benevolent intentions; the third sacrificing fortune and happiness: all three owing their mischance to one or other of the vague ideas disturbing men's heads! Where shall we look for mother wit?—or say, common suckling's instinct? Not to men, thought Rosamund.

She was listening to the voices of Mr. Romfrey and Beauchamp in a fever. Ordinarily the lord of Steynham was not out of his bed later than twelve o'clock at night. His door opened at half-past one. Not a syllable was exchanged by the couple in the hall. They had fought it out. Mr. Romfrey came upstairs alone, and on the closing of his chamber-door she slipped down to Beauchamp and had a dreadful hour with him that subdued

her disposition to sit in judgement upon men. The unavailing attempt to move his uncle had wrought him to the state in which passionate thoughts pass into speech like heat to flame. Rosamund strained her mental sight to gain a conception of his prodigious horror of the treatment of Dr. Shrapnel that she might think him sane: and to retain a vestige of comfort in her bosom she tried to moderate and make light of as much as she could conceive. Between the two efforts she had no sense but that of helplessness. Once more she was reduced to promise that she would speak the whole truth to Mr. Romfrey, even to the fact that she had experienced a common woman's jealousy of Dr. Shrapnel's influence, and had alluded to him jealously, spitefully, and falsely. There was no mercy in Beauchamp. He was for action at any cost, with all the forces he could gather, and without delays. He talked of Cecilia as his uncle's bride to him. Rosamund could hardly trust her ears when he informed her he had told his uncle of his determination to compel him to accomplish the act of penitence. 'Was it prudent to *say* it, Nevil?' she asked. But, as in his politics, he disdained prudence. A monstrous crime had been committed, involving the honour of the family:—no subtlety of insinuation, no suggestion, could wean him from the fixed idea that the apology to Dr. Shrapnel must be spoken by his uncle in person.

'If one could only *imagine* Mr. Romfrey doing it!' Rosamund groaned.

'He shall: and you will help him,' said Beauchamp.

'If you loved a woman half as much as you do that man!'

'If I knew a woman as good, as wise, as noble as he!'

'You are losing her.'

'You expect me to go through ceremonies of courtship at a time like this! If she cares for me she will feel with

me. Simple compassion—but let Miss Halkett be. I 'm afraid I overtasked her in taking her to Bevisham. She remained outside the garden. Ma'am, she is unsullied by contact with a single shrub of Dr. Shrapnel's territory.'

'Do not be so bitterly ironical, Nevil. You have not seen her as I have.'

Rosamund essayed a tender sketch of the fair young lady, and fancied that she drew forth a sigh; she would have coloured the sketch, but he commanded her to hurry off to bed, and think of her morning's work.

A commission of which we feel we can accurately forecast the unsuccessful end is not likely to be undertaken with an ardour that might perhaps astound the presageing mind with unexpected issues. Rosamund fulfilled hers in the style of one who has learnt a lesson, and, exactly as she had anticipated, Mr. Romfrey accused her of coming to him from a conversation with that fellow Nevil overnight. He shrugged and left the house for his morning's walk across the fields.

Colonel Halkett and Cecilia beheld him from the breakfast-room returning with Beauchamp, who had waylaid him and was hammering his part in the now-endless altercation. It could be descried at any distance; and how fine was Mr. Romfrey's bearing!—truly noble by contrast, as of a grave big dog worried by a small barking dog. There is to an unsympathetic observer an intense vexatiousness in the exhibition of such pertinacity. To a soldier accustomed at a glance to estimate powers of attack and defence, this repeated puny assailing of a fortress that required years of siege was in addition ridiculous. Mr. Romfrey appeared impregnable, and Beauchamp mad. 'He 's foaming again!' said the colonel, and was only ultra-pictorial. 'Before breakfast!' was a further slur on Beauchamp.

Mr. Romfrey was elevated by the extraordinary comicality of the notion of the proposed apology to heights of humour beyond laughter, whence we see the unbounded capacity of the general man for folly, and rather commiserate than deride him. He was quite untroubled. It demanded a steady view of the other side of the case to suppose of one whose control of his temper was perfect, that he could be in the wrong. He at least did not think so, and Colonel Halkett relied on his common sense. Beauchamp's brows were smouldering heavily, except when he had to talk. He looked paleish and worn, and said he had been up early. Cecilia guessed that he had not been to bed.

It was dexterously contrived by her host, in spite of the colonel's manifest anxiety to keep them asunder, that she should have some minutes with Beauchamp out in the gardens. Mr. Romfrey led them out, and then led the colonel away to offer him a choice of pups of rare breed.

'Nevil,' said Cecilia, 'you will not think it presumption in me to give you advice?'

Her counsel to him was, that he should leave Steynham immediately, and trust to time for his uncle to reconsider his conduct.

Beauchamp urged the counter-argument of the stain on the family honour.

She hinted at expediency; he frankly repudiated it.

The downs faced them, where the heavenly vast 'might have been' of yesterday wandered thinner than a shadow of to-day; weaving a story without beginning, crisis, or conclusion, flowerless and fruitless, but with something of infinite in it sweeter to brood on than the future of her life to Cecilia.

'If meanwhile Dr. Shrapnel should die, and repentance comes too late!' said Beauchamp.

She had no clear answer to that, save the hope of its

being an unfounded apprehension. 'As far as it is in my power, Nevil, I will avoid injustice to him in my thoughts.'

He gazed at her thankfully. 'Well,' said he, 'that 's like sighting the cliffs. But I don't feel home round me while the colonel is so strangely prepossessed. For a high-spirited gentleman like your father to approve, or at least accept, an act so barbarous is incomprehensible. Speak to him, Cecilia, will you? Let him know your ideas.'

She assented. He said instantly, 'Persuade him to speak to my uncle Everard.'

She was tempted to smile.

'I must do only what I think wise, if I am to be of service, Nevil.'

'True, but paint that scene to him. An old man, utterly defenceless, making no defence! a cruel error! The colonel can't, or he doesn't, clearly get it inside him, otherwise I 'm certain it would revolt him: just as I 'm certain my uncle Everard is at this moment a stone-blind man. If he has done a thing, he can't question it, won't examine it. The thing becomes a part of him, as much as his hand or his head. He 's a man of the twelfth century. Your father might be helped to understand him first.'

'Yes,' she said, not very warmly, though sadly.

'Tell the colonel how it must have been brought about. For Cecil Baskelett called on Dr. Shrapnel two days before Mr. Romfrey stood at his gate.'

The name of Cecil caused her to draw in her shoulders in a half-shudder. 'It may indeed be Captain Baskelett who set this cruel thing in motion!'

'Then point that out to your father, said he, perceiving a chance of winning her to his views through a concrete object of her dislike, and cooling toward the woman

who betrayed a vulgar characteristic of her sex; who was merely woman, unable sternly to recognize the doing of a foul wrong because of her antipathy, until another antipathy enlightened her.

He wanted in fact a ready-made heroine, and did not giver her credit for the absence of fire in her blood, as well as for the unexercised imagination which excludes young women from the power to realize unwonted circumstances. We men walking about the world have perhaps no more imagination of matters not domestic than they; but what we have is quick with experience: we see the thing we hear of: women come to it how they can.

Cecilia was recommended to weave a narrative for her father, and ultimately induce him, if she could, to give a gentleman's opinion of the case to Mr. Romfrey.

Her sensitive ear caught a change of tone in the directions she received. 'Your father will say so and so: answer him with this and that.' Beauchamp supplied her with phrases. She was to renew and renew the attack; hammer as he did. Yesterday she had followed him: to-day she was to march beside him—hardly as an equal. Patience! was the word she would have uttered in her detection of the one frailty in his nature which this hurrying of her off her feet opened her eyes to with unusual perspicacity. Still she leaned to him sufficiently to admit that he had grounds for a deep disturbance of his feelings.

He said: 'I go to Dr. Shrapnel's cottage, and don't know how to hold up my head before Miss Denham. She confided him to me when she left for Switzerland!'

There was that to be thought of, certainly.

Colonel Halkett came round a box-bush and discovered them pacing together in a fashion to satisfy his paternal scrutiny.

'I 've been calling you several times, my dear,' he

complained. 'We start in seven minutes. Bustle, and bonnet at once. Nevil, I 'm sorry for this business. Good-bye. Be a good boy, Nevil,' he murmured kind-heartedly, and shook Beauchamp's hand with the cordiality of an extreme relief in leaving him behind.

The colonel and Mr. Romfrey and Beauchamp were standing on the hall-steps when Rosamund beckoned the latter and whispered a request for *that letter* of Dr. Shrapnel's. 'It is for Miss Halkett, Nevil.'

He plucked the famous epistle from his bulging pocket-book, and added a couple of others in the same handwriting.

'Tell her, a first reading—it 's difficult to read at first,' he said, and burned to read it to Cecilia himself: to read it to her with his comments and explanations appeared imperative. It struck him in a flash that Cecilia's counsel to him to quit Steynham for awhile was good. And if he went to Bevisham he would be assured of Dr. Shrapnel's condition: notes and telegrams from the cottage were too much tempered to console and deceive him.

'Send my portmanteau and bag after me to Bevisham,' he said to Rosamund, and announced to the woefully astonished colonel that he would have the pleasure of journeying in his company as far as the town.

'Are you ready? No packing?' said the colonel.

'It 's better to have your impediments in the rear of you, and march!' said Mr. Romfrey.

Colonel Halkett declined to wait for anybody. He shouted for his daughter. The lady's maid appeared, and then Cecilia with Rosamund.

'We can't entertain you, Nevil; we 're away to the island: I 'm sorry,' said the colonel; and observing Cecilia's face in full crimson, he looked at her as if he had lost a battle by the turn of events at the final moment.

Mr. Romfrey handed Cecilia into the carriage. He exchanged a friendly squeeze with the colonel, and offered his hand to his nephew. Beauchamp passed him with a nod and 'Good-bye, sir.'

'Have ready at Holdesbury for the middle of the month,' said Mr. Romfrey, unruffled, and bowed to Cecilia.

'If you think of bringing my cousin Baskelett, give me warning, sir,' cried Beauchamp.

'Give me warning, if you want the house for Shrapnel,' replied his uncle, and remarked to Rosamund, as the carriage wheeled round the mounded laurels to the avenue, 'He mayn't be quite cracked. The fellow seems to have a turn for catching his opportunity by the tail. He had better hold fast, for it 's his last.'

CHAPTER XXXVII

CECILIA CONQUERED

The carriage rolled out of the avenue and through the park, for some time parallel with the wavy downs. Once away from Steynham Colonel Halkett breathed freely, as if he had dropped a load: he was free of his bond to Mr. Romfrey, and so great was the sense of relief in him that he resolved to do battle against his daughter, supposing her still lively blush to be the sign of the enemy's flag run up on a surrendered citadel. His authority was now to be thought of: his paternal sanction was in his own keeping. Beautiful as she looked, it was hardly credible that a fellow in possession of his reason could have let slip his chance of such a prize; but whether he had or had not, the colonel felt that he occupied a position enabling

him either to out-manœuvre, or, if need were, interpose forcibly and punish him for his half-heartedness.

Cecilia looked the loveliest of women to Beauchamp's eyes, with her blush, and the letters of Dr. Shrapnel in her custody, at her express desire. Certain terms in the letters here and there, unsweet to ladies, began to trouble his mind.

'By the way, colonel,' he said, 'you had a letter of Dr. Shrapnel's read to you by Captain Baskelett.'

'Iniquitous rubbish!'

'With his comments on it, I dare say you thought it so. I won't speak of his right to make it public. He wanted to produce his impressions of it and me, and that is a matter between him and me. Dr. Shrapnel makes use of strong words now and then, but I undertake to produce a totally different impression on you by reading the letter myself—sparing you' (he turned to Cecilia) 'a word or two, common enough to men who write in black earnest and have humour.' He cited his old favourite, the black and bright lecturer on Heroes. 'You have read him, I know, Cecilia. Well, Dr. Shrapnel is another, who writes in his own style, not the leading-article style or modern pulpit stuff. He writes to rouse.'

'He does that to my temper,' said the colonel.

'Perhaps here and there he might offend Cecilia's taste,' Beauchamp pursued for her behoof. 'Everything depends on the mouthpiece. I should not like the letter to be read without my being by;—except by men: any just-minded man may read it: Seymour Austin, for example. Every line is a text to the mind of the writer. Let me call on you to-morrow.'

'To-morrow?' Colonel Halkett put on a thoughtful air. 'To-morrow we 're off to the island for a couple of days; and there 's Lord Croyston's garden party, and

the Yacht Ball. Come this evening—dine with us. No reading of letters, please. I can't stand it, Nevil.'

The invitation was necessarily declined by a gentleman who could not expect to be followed by supplies of clothes and linen for evening wear that day.

'Ah, we shall see you some day or other,' said the colonel.

Cecilia was less alive to Beauchamp's endeavour to prepare her for the harsh words in the letter than to her father's insincerity. She would have asked her friend to come in the morning next day, but for the dread of deepening her blush.

'Do you intend to start so early in the morning, papa?' she ventured to say; and he replied, 'As early as possible.'

'I don't know what news I shall have in Bevisham, or I would engage to run over to the island,' said Beauchamp, with a flattering persistency or singular obtuseness.

'You will dance,' he subsequently observed to Cecilia, out of the heart of some reverie. He had been her admiring partner on the night before the drive from Itchincope into Bevisham, and perhaps thought of her graceful dancing at the Yacht Ball, and the contrast it would present to his watch beside a sick man—struck down by one of his own family.

She could have answered, 'Not if you wish me not to'; while smiling at the quaint sorrowfulness of his tone.

'Dance!' quoth Colonel Halkett, whose present temper discerned a healthy antagonism to misanthropic Radicals in the performance, 'all young people dance. Have you given over dancing?'

'Not entirely, colonel.'

Cecilia danced with Mr. Tuckham at the Yacht Ball, and was vividly mindful of every slight incident leading

to and succeeding her lover's abrupt, 'You will dance': which had all passed by her dream-like up to that hour: his attempt to forewarn her of the phrases she would deem objectionable in Dr. Shrapnel's letter; his mild acceptation of her father's hostility; his adieu to her, and his melancholy departure on foot from the station, as she drove away to Mount Laurels and gaiety. Why do I dance? she asked herself. It was not in the spirit of happiness. Her heart was not with Dr. Shrapnel, but very near him, and heavy as a chamber of the sick. She was afraid of her father's favourite, imagining, from the colonel's unconcealed opposition to Beauchamp, that he had designs in the interests of Mr. Tuckham. But the hearty gentleman scattered her secret terrors by his bluffness and openness. He asked her to remember that she had recommended him to listen to Seymour Austin, and he had done so, he said. Undoubtedly he was much improved, much less overbearing.

He won her confidence by praising and loving her father, and when she alluded to the wonderful services he had rendered on the Welsh estate, he said simply that her father's thanks repaid him. He recalled his former downrightness only in speaking of the case of Dr. Shrapnel, upon which, both with the colonel and with her, he was unreservedly condemnatory of Mr. Romfrey. Colonel Halkett's defence of the true knight and guardian of the reputation of ladies, fell to pieces in the presence of Mr. Tuckham. He had seen Dr. Shrapnel, on a visit to Mr. Lydiard, whom he described as hanging about Bevisham, philandering as a married man should not, though in truth he might soon expect to be released by the death of his crazy wife. The doctor, he said, had been severely shaken by the monstrous assault made on him, and had been most unrighteously handled. The doctor was an inoffensive man in his private life, detestable and

dangerous though his teachings were. Outside politics Mr. Tuckham went altogether with Beauchamp. He promised also that old Mrs. Beauchamp should be accurately informed of the state of matters between Captain Beauchamp and Mr. Romfrey. He left Mount Laurels to go back in attendance on the venerable lady, without once afflicting Cecilia with a shiver of well-founded apprehension, and she was grateful to him almost to friendly affection in the vanishing of her unjust suspicion, until her father hinted that there was the man of his heart. Then she closed all avenues to her own.

A period of maidenly distress not previously unknown to her ensued. Proposals of marriage were addressed to her by two untitled gentlemen, and by the Earl of Lockrace: three within a fortnight. The recognition of the young heiress's beauty at the Yacht Ball was accountable for the bursting out of these fires. Her father would not have deplored her acceptance of the title of Countess of Lockrace. In the matter of rejections, however, her will was paramount, and he was on her side against relatives when the subject was debated among them. He called her attention to the fact impressively, telling her that she should not hear a syllable from him to persuade her to marry: the emphasis of which struck the unspoken warning on her intelligence: Bring no man to me of whom I do not approve!

'Worthier of you, *as I hope to become*,' Beauchamp had said. Cecilia lit on that part of Dr. Shrapnel's letter where 'Fight this out within you,' distinctly alluded to the unholy love. Could she think ill of the man who thus advised him? She shared Beauchamp's painful feeling for him in a sudden tremour of her frame; as it were through his touch. To the rest of the letter her judgement stood opposed, save when a sentence here and there reminded her of Captain Baskelett's insolent sing-

song declamation of it: and that would have turned Sacred Writing to absurdity.

Beauchamp had mentioned Seymour Austin as one to whom he would willingly grant a perusal of the letter. Mr. Austin came to Mount Laurels about the close of the yachting season, shortly after Colonel Halkett had spent his customary days of September shooting at Steynham. Beauchamp's folly was the colonel's theme, for the fellow had dragged Lord Palmet there, and driven his uncle out of patience. Mr. Romfrey's monumental patience had been exhausted by him. The colonel boiled over with accounts of Beauchamp's behaviour toward his uncle, and Palmet, and Baskelett, and Mrs. Culling: how he flew at and worried everybody who seemed to him to have had a hand in the proper chastisement of that man Shrapnel. That pestiferous letter of Shrapnel's was animadverted on, of course; and, 'I should like you to have heard it, Austin,' the colonel said, 'just for you to have a notion of the kind of universal blow-up those men are scheming, and would hoist us with, if they could get a little more blasting-powder than they mill in their lunatic heads.'

Now Cecilia wished for Mr. Austin's opinion of Dr. Shrapnel; and as the delicate state of her inclinations made her conscious that to give him the letter covertly would be to betray them to him, who had once, not knowing it, moved her to think of a possible great change in her life, she mustered courage to say, 'Captain Beauchamp at my request lent me the letter to read; I have it, and others written by Dr. Shrapnel.'

Her father hummed to himself, and immediately begged Seymour Austin not to waste his time on the stuff, though he had no idea that a perusal of it could awaken other than the gravest reprehension in so rational a Tory gentleman.

Mr. Austin read the letter through. He asked to see the other letters mentioned by Cecilia, and read them calmly, without a frown or an interjection. She sat sketching, her father devouring newspaper columns.

'It 's the writing of a man who means well,' Mr. Austin delivered his opinion.

'Why, the man 's an infidel!' Colonel Halkett exclaimed.

'There are numbers.'

'They have the grace not to confess, then.'

'It 's as well to know what the world 's made of, colonel. The clergy shut their eyes. There 's no treating a disease without reading it; and if we are to acknowledge a "vice," as Dr. Shrapnel would say of the so-called middle-class, it is the smirking over what they think, or their not caring to think at all. Too many time-servers rot the State. I can understand the effect of such writing on a mind like Captain Beauchamp's. It would do no harm to our young men to have those letters read publicly and lectured on—by competent persons. Half the thinking world may think pretty much the same on some points as Dr. Shrapnel; they are too wise or too indolent to say it: and of the other half, about a dozen members would be competent to reply to him. He is the earnest man, and flies at politics as uneasy young brains fly to literature, fancying they can write because they can write with a pen. He perceives a bad adjustment of things: which is correct. He is honest, and takes his honesty for a virtue: and that entitles him to believe in himself: and that belief causes him to see in all opposition to him the wrong he has perceived in existing circumstances: and so in a dream of power he invokes the people: and as they do not stir, he takes to prophecy. This is the round of the politics of impatience. The study of politics should be guided by some light of statesmanship, otherwise it comes to this wild preaching.

These men are theory-tailors, not politicians. They are the men who make the "strait-waistcoat for humanity." They would fix us to first principles like tethered sheep or hobbled horses. I should enjoy replying to him, if I had time. The whole letter is composed of variations upon one idea. Still I must say the man interests me; I should like to talk to him.'

Mr. Austin paid no heed to the colonel's 'Dear me! dear me!' of amazement. He said of the style of the letters, that it was the puffing of a giant: a strong wind rather than speech: and begged Cecilia to note that men who labour to force their dreams on mankind and turn vapour into fact, usually adopt such a style. Hearing that this private letter had been deliberately read through by Mr. Romfrey, and handed by him to Captain Baskelett, who had read it out in various places, Mr. Austin said: 'A strange couple!' He appeared perplexed by his old friend's approval of them. 'There we decidedly differ,' said he, when the case of Dr. Shrapnel was related by the colonel, with a refusal to condemn Mr. Romfrey. He pronounced Mr. Romfrey's charges against Dr. Shrapnel, taken in conjunction with his conduct, to be baseless, childish, and wanton. The colonel would not see the case in that light; but Cecilia did. It was a justification of Beauchamp; and how could she ever have been blind to it?—scarcely blind, she remembered, but sensitively blinking her eyelids to distract her sight in contemplating it, and to preserve her repose. As to Beauchamp's demand of the apology, Mr. Austin considered that it might be an instance of his want of knowledge of men, yet could not be called silly, and to call it insane was the rhetoric of an adversary.

'I do call it insane,' said the colonel.

He separated himself from his daughter by a sharp division.

Had Beauchamp appeared at Mount Laurels, Cecilia would have been ready to support and encourage him, boldly. Backed by Mr. Austin, she saw some good in Dr. Shrapnel's writing, much in Beauchamp's devotedness. He shone clear to her reason, at last: partly because her father in his opposition to him did not, but was on the contrary unreasonable, cased in mail, mentally clouded. She sat with Mr. Austin and her father, trying repeatedly, in obedience to Beauchamp's commands, to bring the latter to a just contemplation of the unhappy case; behaviour on her part which rendered the colonel inveterate.

Beauchamp at this moment was occupied in doing secretary's work for Dr. Shrapnel. So Cecilia learnt from Mr. Lydiard, who came to pay his respects to Mrs. Wardour-Devereux at Mount Laurels. The pursuit of the apology was continued in letters to his uncle and occasional interviews with him, which were by no means instigated by the doctor, Mr. Lydiard informed the ladies. He described Beauchamp as acting in the spirit of a man who has sworn an oath to abandon every pleasure in life, that he may, as far as it lies in his power, indemnify his friend for the wrong done to him.

'Such men are too terrible for me,' said Mrs. Devereux.

Cecilia thought the reverse: Not for me! But she felt a strain upon her nature, and she was miserable in her alienation from her father. Kissing him one night, she laid her head on his breast, and begged his forgiveness. He embraced her tenderly. 'Wait, only wait; you will see I am right,' he said, and prudently said no more, and did not ask her to speak.

She was glad that she had sought the reconciliation from her heart's natural warmth, on hearing some time later that M. de Croisnel was dead, and that Beauchamp meditated starting for France to console his Renée. Her

continual agitations made her doubtful of her human feelings: she clung to that instance of her filial stedfastness.

The day before Cecilia and her father left Mount Laurels for their season in Wales, Mr. Tuckham and Beauchamp came together to the house, and were closeted an hour with her father. Cecilia sat in the drawing-room, thinking that she did indeed wait, and had great patience. Beauchamp entered the room alone. He looked worn and thin, of a leaden colour, like the cloud that bears the bolt. News had reached him of the death of Lord Avonley in the hunting-field, and he was going on to Steynham to persuade his uncle to accompany him to Bevisham and wash the guilt of his wrong-doing off him before applying for the title. 'You would advise me not to go?' he said. 'I must. I should be dishonoured myself if I let a chance pass. I run the risk of being a beggar: I 'm all but one now.'

Cecilia faltered: 'Do you see a chance?'

'Hardly more than an excuse for trying it,' he replied.

She gave him back Dr. Shrapnel's letters. 'I have read them,' was all she said. For he might have just returned from France, with the breath of Renée about him, and her pride would not suffer her to melt him in rivalry by saying what she had been led to think of the letters.

Hearing nothing from her, he silently put them in his pocket. The struggle with his uncle seemed to be souring him or deadening him.

They were not alone for long. Mr. Tuckham presented himself to take his leave of her. Old Mrs. Beauchamp was dying, and he had only come to Mount Laurels on special business. Beauchamp was just as anxious to hurry away.

Her father found her sitting in the solitude of a drawing-room at midday, pale-faced, with unoccupied fingers, not even a book in her lap.

He walked up and down the room until Cecilia, to say something, said: 'Mr. Tuckham could not stay.'

'No,' said her father; 'he could not. He has to be back as quick as he can to cut his legacy in halves!'

Cecilia looked perplexed.

'I 'll speak plainly,' said the colonel. 'He sees that Nevil has ruined himself with his uncle. The old lady won't allow Nevil to visit her; in her condition it would be an excitement beyond her strength to bear. She sent Blackburn to bring Nevil here, and give him the option of stating before me whether those reports about his misconduct in France were true or not. He demurred at first: however, he says they are not true. He would have run away with the Frenchwoman, and he would have fought the duel: but he did neither. Her brother ran ahead of him and fought for him: so he declares: and she wouldn't run. So the reports are false. We shall know what Blackburn makes of the story when we hear of the legacy. I have been obliged to write word to Mrs. Beauchamp that I believe Nevil to have made a true statement of the facts. But I distinctly say, and so I told Blackburn, I don't think money will do Nevil Beauchamp a farthing's worth of good. Blackburn follows his own counsel. He induced the old lady to send him; so I suppose he intends to let her share the money between them. I thought better of him; I thought him a wiser man.'

Gratitude to Mr. Tuckham on Beauchamp's behalf caused Cecilia to praise him, in the tone of compliments. The difficulty of seriously admiring two gentlemen at once is a feminine dilemma, with the maidenly among women.

'He has disappointed me,' said Colonel Halkett.

'Would you have had him allow a falsehood to enrich him and ruin Nevil, papa?'

'My dear child, I 'm sick to death of romantic fellows. I took Blackburn for one of our solid young men. Why should he share his aunt's fortune?'

'You mean, why should Nevil have money?'

'Well, I do mean that. Besides, the story was not false as far as his intentions went: he confessed it, and I ought to have put it in a postscript. If Nevil wants money, let him learn to behave himself like a gentleman at Steynham.'

'He has not failed.'

'I 'll say, then, behave himself, simply. He considers it a point of honour to get his uncle Everard to go down on his knees to Shrapnel. But he has no moral sense where I should like to see it: none: he confessed it.'

'What were his words, papa?'

'I don't remember words. He runs over to France, whenever it suits him, to carry on there . . .' The colonel ended in a hum and buzz.

'Has he been to France lately?' asked Cecilia.

Her breath hung for the answer, sedately though she sat.

'The woman's father is dead, I hear,' Colonel Halkett remarked.

'But he has not been there?'

'How can I tell? He 's anywhere, wherever his passions whisk him.'

'No!'

'I say, yes. And if he has money, we shall see him going sky-high and scattering it in sparks, not merely spending; I mean living immorally, infidelizing, republicanizing, scandalizing his class and his country.'

'Oh no!' exclaimed Cecilia, rising and moving to the

window to feast her eyes on driving clouds, in a strange exaltation of mind, secretly sure now that her idea of Nevil's having gone over to France was groundless, and feeling that she had been unworthy of him who strove to be 'worthier of her, as he hoped to become.'

Colonel Halkett scoffed at her 'Oh no,' and called it woman's logic.

She could not restrain herself. 'Have you forgotten Mr. Austin, papa? It is Nevil's perfect truthfulness that makes him appear worse to you than men who are time-servers. Too many time-servers rot the State, Mr. Austin said. Nevil is not one of them. I am not able to judge or speculate whether he has a great brain or is likely to distinguish himself out of his profession: I would rather he did not abandon it: but Mr. Austin said to me in talking of him . . .'

'That notion of Austin's of screwing women's minds up to the pitch of men's!' interjected the colonel with a despairing flap of his arm.

'He said, papa, that honestly active men in a country, who decline to practise hypocrisy, show that the blood runs, and are a sign of health.'

'You misunderstood him, my dear.'

'I think I thoroughly understood him. He did not call them wise. He said they might be dangerous if they were not met in debate. But he said, and I presume to think truly, that the reason why they are decried is, that it is too great a trouble for a lazy world to meet them. And, he said, the reason why the honest factions agitate is because they encounter sneers until they appear in force. If they were met earlier, and fairly—I am only quoting him—they would not, I think he said, or would hardly, or would not generally, fall into professional agitation.'

'Austin 's a speculative Tory, I know; and that 's his weakness,' observed the colonel. 'But I 'm certain you

misunderstood him. He never would have called us a lazy people.'

'Not in matters of business: in matters of thought.'

'My dear Cecilia! You 've got hold of a language! . . . a way of speaking! . . . Who set you thinking on these things?'

'That I owe to Nevil Beauchamp.'

Colonel Halkett indulged in a turn or two up and down the room. He threw open a window, sniffed the moist air, and went to his daughter to speak to her resolutely.

'Between a Radical and a Tory, I don't know where your head has been whirled to, my dear. Your heart seems to be gone: more sorrow for us! And for Nevil Beauchamp to be pretending to love you while carrying on with this Frenchwoman!'

'He has never said that he loved me.'

The splendour of her beauty in humility flashed on her father, and he cried out: 'You are too good for any man on earth! We won't talk in the dark, my darling. You tell me he has never, as they say, made love to you?'

'Never, papa.'

'Well, that proves the French story. At any rate, he 's a man of honour. But you love him?'

'The French story is untrue, papa.'

Cecilia stood in a blush like the burning cloud of the sunset.'

'Tell me frankly: I 'm your father, your old dada, your friend, my dear girl! do you think the man cares for you, loves you?'

She replied: 'I know, papa, the French story is untrue.'

'But when I tell you, silly woman, he confessed it to me out of his own mouth!'

'It is not true now.'

'It 's not going on, you mean? How do you know?'

'I know.'

'Has he been swearing it?'

'He has not spoken of it to me.'

'Here I am in a woman's web!' cried the colonel. 'Is it your instinct tells you it 's not true? or what? what? You have not denied that you love the man.'

'I know he is not immoral.'

'There you shoot again! Haven't you a yes or a no for your father?'

Cecilia cast her arms round his neck, and sobbed.

She could not bring it to her lips to say (she would have shunned the hearing) that her defence of Beauchamp, which was a shadowed avowal of the state of her heart, was based on his desire to read to her the conclusion of Dr. Shrapnel's letter touching a passion to be overcome; necessarily therefore a passion that was vanquished, and the fullest and bravest explanation of his shifting treatment of her: nor would she condescend to urge that her lover would have said he loved her when they were at Steynham, but for the misery and despair of a soul too noble to be diverted from his grief and sense of duty, and, as she believed, unwilling to speak to win her while his material fortune was in jeopardy.

The colonel cherished her on his breast, with one hand regularly patting her shoulder: a form of consolation that cures the disposition to sob as quickly as would the drip of water.

Cecilia looked up into his eyes, and said, 'We will not be parted, papa, ever.'

The colonel said absently: 'No'; and, surprised at himself, added: 'No, certainly not. How can we be parted? You won't run away from me? No, you know too well I can't resist you. I appeal to your judgement, and I must accept what you decide. But he is immoral. I repeat that. He has no roots. We shall discover it before it 's too late, I hope.'

Cecilia gazed away, breathing through tremulous dilating nostrils.

'One night after dinner at Steynham,' pursued the colonel, 'Nevil was rattling against the Press, with Stukely Culbrett to prime him: and he said editors of papers were growing to be like priests, and as timid as priests, and arrogant: and for one thing, it was because they supposed themselves to be guardians of the national morality. I forget exactly what the matter was: but he sneered at priests and morality.'

A smile wove round Cecilia's lips, and in her towering superiority to one who talked nonsense, she slipped out of maiden shame and said: 'Attack Nevil for his political heresies and his wrath with the Press for not printing him. The rest concerns his honour, where he is quite safe, and all are who trust him.'

'If you find out you 're wrong?'

She shook her head.

'But if you find out you 're wrong about him,' her father reiterated piteously, 'you won't tear me to strips to have him in spite of it?'

'No, papa, not I. I will not.'

'Well, that 's something for me to hold fast to,' said Colonel Halkett, sighing.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

LORD AVONLEY

Mr. Everard Romfrey was now, by consent, Lord Avonley, mounted on his direct heirship and riding hard at the earldom. His elevation occurred at a period of life that would have been a season of decay with most men;

but the prolonged and lusty Autumn of the veteran took new fires from a tangible object to live for. His brother Craven's death had slightly stupefied, and it had grieved him: it seemed to him peculiarly pathetic; for as he never calculated on the happening of mortal accidents to men of sound constitution, the circumstance imparted a curious shake to his own solidity. It was like the quaking of earth, which tries the balance of the strongest. If he had not been raised to so splendid a survey of the actual world, he might have been led to think of the imaginary, where perchance a man may meet his old dogs and a few other favourites, in a dim perpetual twilight. Thither at all events Craven had gone, and good-night to him! The earl was a rapidly lapsing invalid. There could be no doubt that Everard was to be the head of his House.

Outwardly he was the same tolerant gentleman who put aside the poor fools of the world to walk undisturbed by them in the paths he had chosen: in this aspect he knew himself: nor was the change so great within him as to make him cognizant of a change. It was only a secret turn in the bent of the mind, imperceptible as the touch of the cunning artist's brush on a finished portrait, which will alter the expression without discomposing a feature, so that you cannot say it is another face, yet it is not the former one. His habits were invariable, as were his meditations. He thought less of Romfrey Castle than of his dogs and his devices for trapping vermin; his interest in birds and beasts and herbs, 'what ninnies call Nature in books,' to quote him, was undiminished; imagination he had none to clap wings to his head and be off with it. He betrayed as little as he felt that the coming Earl of Romfrey was different from the cadet of the family.

A novel sharpness in the 'Stop that,' with which he crushed Beauchamp's affectedly gentle and unusually roundabout opening of the vexed Shrapnel question, rang

like a shot in the room at Steynham, and breathed a different spirit from his customary easy pugnacity that welcomed and lured on an adversary to wild outhitting. Some sorrowful preoccupation is, however, to be expected in the man who has lost a brother, and some degree of irritability at the intrusion of past disputes. He chose to repeat a similar brief forbidding of the subject before they started together for the scene of the accident and Romfrey Castle. No notice was taken of Beauchamp's remark, that he consented to go though his duty lay elsewhere. Beauchamp had not the faculty of reading inside men, or he would have apprehended that his uncle was engaged in silently heaping aggravations to shoot forth one fine day a thundering and astonishing counterstroke.

He should have known his uncle Everard better.

In this respect he seemed to have no memory. But who has much that has given up his brains for a lodging to a single idea? It is at once a devouring dragon, and an intractable steam-force; it is a tyrant that has eaten up a senate, and a prophet with a message. Inspired of solitariness and gigantic size, it claims divine origin. The world can have no peace for it.

Cecilia had not pleased him; none had. He did not bear in mind that the sight of Dr. Shrapnel sick and weak, which constantly reanimated his feelings of pity and of wrath, was not given to the others of whom he demanded a corresponding energy of just indignation and sympathy. The sense that he was left unaided to the task of bending his tough uncle, combined with his appreciation of the righteousness of the task to embitter him and set him on a pedestal, from which he descended at every sign of an opportunity for striking, and to which he retired continually baffled and wrathful, in isolation.

Then ensued the dreadful division in his conception of his powers: for he who alone saw the just and right thing

to do, was incapable of compelling it to be done. Lay on to his uncle as he would, that wrestler shook him off. And here was one man whom he could not move! How move a nation?

There came on him a thirst for the haranguing of crowds. They agree with you or they disagree; exciting you to activity in either case. They do not interpose cold Tory exclusiveness and inaccessibility. You have them in the rough; you have nature in them, and all that is hopeful in nature. You drive at, over, and through them, for their good; you plough them. You sow them too. Some of them perceive that it *is* for their good, and what if they be a minority? Ghastly as a minority is in an Election, in a lifelong struggle it is refreshing and encouraging. The young world and its triumph is with the minority. Oh to be speaking! Condemned to silence beside his uncle, Beauchamp chafed for a loosed tongue and an audience tossing like the well-whipped ocean, or open as the smooth sea-surface to the marks of the breeze. Let them be hostile or amicable, he wanted an audience as hotly as the humped Richard a horse.

At Romfrey Castle he fell upon an audience that became transformed into a swarm of chatterers, advisers, and reprovers the instant his lips were parted. The ladies of the family declared his pursuit of the Apology to be worse and vainer than his politics. The gentlemen said the same, but they were not so outspoken to him personally, and indulged in asides, with quotations of some of his uncle Everard's recent observations concerning him: as for example, 'Politically he 's a mad harlequin jumping his tights and spangles when nobody asks him to jump; and in private life he 's a mad dentist poking his tongs at my sound tooth:' a highly ludicrous image of the persistent fellow, and a reminder of situations in Molière, as it was acted by Cecil Baskelett and Lord Welshpool. Beauchamp

had to a certain extent restored himself to favour with his uncle Everard by offering a fair suggestion on the fatal field to account for the accident, after the latter had taken measurements and examined the place in perplexity. His elucidation of the puzzle was referred to by Lord Avonley at Romfrey, and finally accepted as possible: and this from a wiseacre who went quacking about the county, expecting to upset the order of things in England! Such a mixing of sense and nonsense in a fellow's noddle was never before met with, Lord Avonley said. Cecil took the hint. He had been unworried by Beauchamp: Dr. Shrapnel had not been mentioned: and it delighted Cecil to let it be known that he thought old Nevil had some good notions, particularly as to the duties of the aristocracy—that first war-cry of his when a midshipman. News of another fatal accident in the hunting-field confirmed Cecil's higher opinion of his cousin. On the day of Craven's funeral they heard at Romfrey that Mr. Wardour-Devereux had been killed by a fall from his horse. Two English gentlemen despatched by the same agency within a fortnight! 'He smoked,' Lord Avonley said of the second departure, to allay some perturbation in the bosoms of the ladies who had ceased to ride, by accounting for this particular mishap in the most reassuring fashion. Cecil's immediate reflection was that the unfortunate smoker had left a rich widow. Far behind in the race for Miss Halkett, and uncertain of a settled advantage in his other rivalry with Beauchamp, he fixed his mind on the widow, and as Beauchamp did not stand in his way, but on the contrary might help him—for she, like the generality of women, admired Nevil Beauchamp in spite of her feminine good sense and conservatism—Cecil began to regard the man he felt less opposed to with some recognition of his merits. The two nephews accompanied Lord Avonley to London, and slept at his town-house.

They breakfasted together the next morning on friendly terms. Half an hour afterward there was an explosion; uncle and nephews were scattered fragments: and if Cecil was the first to return to cohesion with his lord and chief, it was, he protested energetically, common policy in a man in his position to do so: all that he looked for being a decent pension and a share in the use of the town-house. Old Nevil, he related, began cross-examining him and entangling him with the cunning of the deuce, in my lord's presence, and having got him to make an admission, old Nevil flung it at the baron, and even crossed him and stood before him when he was walking out of the room. A furious wrangle took place. Nevil and the baron gave it to one another unmercifully. The end of it was that all three flew apart, for Cecil confessed to having a temper, and in contempt of him for the admission wrung out of him, Lord Avonley had pricked it. My lord went down to Steynham, Beauchamp to Holdesbury, and Captain Baskelett to his quarters; whence in a few days he repaired penitently to my lord—the most placable of men when a full submission was offered to him.

Beauchamp did nothing of the kind. He wrote a letter to Steynham in the form of an ultimatum.

This egregious letter was handed to Rosamund for a proof of her darling's lunacy. She in conversation with Stukely Culbrett unhesitatingly accused Cecil of plotting his cousin's ruin.

Mr. Culbrett thought it possible that Cecil had been a little more than humorous in the part he had played in the dispute, and spoke to him.

Then it came out that Lord Avonley had also delivered an ultimatum to Beauchamp.

Time enough had gone by for Cecil to forget his ruffling, and relish the baron's grandly comic spirit in appropriating that big word Apology, and demanding it

from Beauchamp on behalf of the lady ruling his household. What could be funnier than the knocking of Beauchamp's blunderbuss out of his hands, and pointing the muzzle at him!

Cecil dramatized the fun to amuse Mr. Culbrett. Apparently Beauchamp had been staggered on hearing himself asked for the definite article he claimed. He had made a point of speaking of *the* Apology. Lord Avonley did likewise. And each professed to exact it for a deeply aggrieved person: each put it on the ground that it involved the other's rightful ownership of the title of gentleman.

'"An apology to the amiable and virtuous Mistress Culling?" says old Nevil: "an apology? what for?"—"For unbecoming and insolent behaviour," says my lord.'

'I am that lady's friend,' Stukely warned Captain Baskelett. 'Don't let us have a third apology in the field.'

'Perfectly true; you are her friend, and you know what a friend of mine she is,' rejoined Cecil. 'I could swear "that lady" flings the whole affair at me. I give you my word, old Nevil and I were on a capital footing before he and the baron broke up. I praised him for tickling the aristocracy. I backed him heartily; I do now; I 'll do it in Parliament. I know a case of a noble lord, a General in the army, and he received an intimation that he might as well attend the Prussian cavalry manœuvres last Autumn on the Lower Rhine or in Silesia—no matter where. He couldn't go: he was engaged to shoot birds! I give you my word. Now there I see old Nevil 's right. It 's as well we should know something about the Prussian and Austrian cavalry, and if our aristocracy won't go abroad to study cavalry, who is to? no class in the kingdom understands horses as they do. My opinion is, they 're asleep. Nevil should have stuck to that, instead of trying

to galvanize the country and turning against his class. But fancy old Nevil asked for the Apology! It petrified him. "I 've told her nothing but the truth," says Nevil. "Telling the truth to women is an impertinence," says my lord. Nevil swore he 'd have a revolution in the country before he apologized.'

Mr. Culbrett smiled at the absurdity of the change of positions between Beauchamp and his uncle Everard, which reminded him somewhat of the old story of the highwayman innkeeper and the market farmer who had been thoughtful enough to recharge his pistols after quitting the inn at midnight. A practical tu quoque is astonishingly laughable, and backed by a high figure and manner it had the flavour of triumphant repartee. Lord Avonley did not speak of it as a retort upon Nevil, though he reiterated the word Apology amusingly. He put it as due to the lady governing his household; and his ultimatum was, that the Apology should be delivered in terms to satisfy *him* within three months of the date of the demand for it: otherwise blank; but the shadowy index pointed to the destitution of Nevil Beauchamp.

No stroke of retributive misfortune could have been severer to Rosamund than to be thrust forward as the object of humiliation for the man she loved. She saw at a glance how much more likely it was (remote as the possibility appeared) that her lord would perform the act of penitence than her beloved Nevil. And she had no occasion to ask herself why. Lord Avonley had done wrong, and Nevil had not. It was inconceivable that Nevil should apologize to her. It was horrible to picture the act in her mind. She was a very rational woman, quite a woman of the world, yet such was her situation between these two men that the childish tale of a close and consecutive punishment for sins, down to our little naughtinesses and naturalnesses, enslaved her intelligence, and

amazed her with the example made of her, as it were to prove the tale true of our being surely hauled back like domestic animals learning the habits of good society, to the rueful contemplation of certain of our deeds, however wildly we appeal to nature to stand up for them.

But is it so with all of us? No, thought Rosamund, sinking dejectedly from a recognition of the heavenliness of the justice which lashed her and Nevil, and did not scourge Cecil Baskelett. That fine eye for celestially directed consequences is ever haunted by shadows of unfaith likely to obscure it completely when chastisement is not seen to fall on the person whose wickedness is evident to us. It has been established that we do not wax diviner by dragging down the Gods to our level.

Rosamund knew Lord Avonley too well to harass him with further petitions and explanations. Equally vain was it to attempt to persuade Beauchamp. He made use of the house in London, where he met his uncle occasionally, and he called at Steynham for money, that he could have obtained upon the one condition, which was no sooner mentioned than fiery words flew in the room, and the two separated. The leaden look in Beauchamp, noticed by Cecilia Halkett in their latest interview, was deepening, and was of itself a displeasure to Lord Avonley, who liked flourishing faces, and said: 'That fellow 's getting the look of a sweating smith': presumptively in the act of heating his poker at the furnace to stir the country.

It now became an offence to him that Beauchamp should continue doing this in the speeches and lectures he was reported to be delivering; he stamped his foot at the sight of his nephew's name in the daily journals; a novel sentiment of social indignation was expressed by his crying out, at the next request for money: 'Money to prime you to turn the country into a rat-hole? Not a square inch of Pennsylvanian paper-bonds! What right have you to be

lecturing and orationing? You 've no knowledge. All you 've got is your instincts, and that you show in your readiness to exhibit them like a monkey. You ought to be turned inside out on your own stage. You 've lumped your brains on a point or two about Land, and Commonland, and the Suffrage, and you pound away upon them, as if you had the key of the difficulty. It 's the Scotchman's metaphysics; you know nothing clear, and your working-classes know nothing at all; and you blow them with wind like an over-stuffed cow. What you 're driving at is to get hob-nail boots to dance on our heads. Stukely says you should be off over to Ireland. There you 'd swim in your element, and have speechifying from instinct, and howling and pummelling too, enough to last you out. I 'll hand you money for that expedition. You 're one above the number wanted here. You 've a look of bad powder fit only to flash in the pan. I saved you from the post of public donkey, by keeping you out of Parliament. You 're braying and kicking your worst for it still at these meetings of yours. A naval officer preaching about Republicanism and parcelling out the Land!'

Beauchamp replied quietly, 'The lectures I read are Dr. Shrapnel's. When I speak I have his knowledge to back my deficiencies. He is too ill to work, and I consider it my duty to do as much of his work as I can undertake.'

'Ha! You 're the old infidel's Amen clerk. It would rather astonish orthodox congregations to see clerks in our churches getting into the pulpit to read the sermon for sick clergymen,' said Lord Avonley. His countenance furrowed. 'I 'll pay that bill,' he added.

'Pay down half a million!' thundered Beauchamp; and dropping his voice, 'or go to him.'

'You remind me,' his uncle observed. 'I recommend you to ring that bell, and have Mrs. Culling here.'

'If she comes she will hear what I think of her.'

'Then, out of the house!'

'Very well, sir. You decline to supply me with money?'

'I do.'

'I must have it!'

'I dare say. Money 's a chain-cable for holding men to their senses.'

'I ask you, my lord, how I am to carry on Holdesbury?'

'Give it up.'

'I shall have to,' said Beauchamp, striving to be prudent.

'There isn't a doubt of it,' said his uncle, upon a series of nods diminishing in their depth until his head assumed a droll interrogative fixity, with an air of 'What next?'

CHAPTER XXXIX

BETWEEN BEAUCHAMP AND CECILIA

Beauchamp quitted the house without answering as to what next, and without seeing Rosamund.

In the matter of money, as of his physical health, he wanted to do too much at once; he had spent largely of both in his efforts to repair the injury done to Dr. Shrapnel. He was overworked, anxious, restless, craving for a holiday somewhere—in France, possibly; he was all but leaping on board the boat at times, and, unwilling to leave his dear old friend who clung to him, he stayed, keeping his impulses below the tide-mark which leads to action, but where they do not yield peace of spirit. The tone of Renée's letters filled him with misgivings. She wrote word that she had seen M. d'Henriel for the first

time since his return from Italy, and he was much changed, and inclined to thank Roland for the lesson he had received from him at the sword's point. And next she urged Beauchamp to marry, so that he and she might meet, as if she felt a necessity for it. 'I shall love your wife; teach her to think amiably of me,' she said. And her letter contained womanly sympathy for him in his battle with his uncle. Beauchamp thought of his experiences of Cecilia's comparative coldness. He replied that there was no prospect of his marrying; he wished there were one of meeting! He forbore from writing too fervently, but he alluded to happy days in Normandy, and proposed to renew them if she would say she had need of him. He entreated her to deal with him frankly; he reminded her that she must constantly look to him, as she had vowed she would, when in any kind of trouble; and he declared to her that he was unchanged. He meant, of an unchanged disposition to shield and serve her; but the review of her situation, and his knowledge of her quick blood, wrought him to some jealous lover's throbs, which led him to impress his unchangeableness upon her, to bind her to that standard.

She declined his visit: not now; 'not yet': and for that he presumed to chide her, half-sincerely. As far as he knew he stood against everybody save his old friend and Renée; and she certainly would have refreshed his heart for a day. In writing, however, he had an ominous vision of the morrow to the day; and, both for her sake and his own, he was not unrejoiced to hear that she was engaged day and night in nursing her husband. Pursuing his vision of the morrow of an unreproachful day with Renée, the madness of taking her to himself, should she surrender at last to a third persuasion, struck him sharply, now that he and his uncle were foot to foot in downright conflict, and money was the question. He had not much

remaining of his inheritance—about fifteen hundred pounds. He would have to vacate Holdesbury and his uncle's town-house in a month. Let his passion be never so desperate, for a beggared man to think of running away with a wife, or of marrying one, the folly is as big as the worldly offence: no justification is to be imagined. Nay, and there is no justification for the breach of a moral law. Beauchamp owned it, and felt that Renée's resistance to him in Normandy placed her above him. He remembered a saying of his moralist: 'We who interpret things heavenly by things earthly must not hope to juggle with them for our pleasures, and can look to no absolution of evil acts.' The school was a hard one. It denied him holidays; it cut him off from dreams. It ran him in heavy harness on a rough highroad, allowing no turnings to right or left, no wayside croppings; with the simple permission to him that he should daily get thoroughly tired. And what was it Jenny Denham had said on the election day? 'Does incessant battling keep the intellect clear?'

His mind was clear enough to put the case, that either he beheld a tremendous magnification of things, or else that other men did not attach common importance to them; and he decided that the latter was the fact.

An incessant struggle of one man with the world, which position usually ranks his relatives against him, does not conduce to soundness of judgement. He may nevertheless be right in considering that he is right in the main. The world in motion is not so wise that it can pretend to silence the outcry of an ordinarily generous heart even—the very infant of antagonism to its methods and establishments. It is not so difficult to be right against the world when the heart is really active; but the world is our book of humanity, and before insisting that *his* handwriting shall occupy the next blank page of it, the

noble rebel is bound for the sake of his aim to ask himself how much of a giant he is, lest he fall like a blot on the page, instead of inscribing intelligible characters there.

Moreover, his relatives are present to assure him that he did not jump out of Jupiter's head or come of the doctor. They hang on him like an ill-conditioned prickly garment; and if he complains of the irritation they cause him, they one and all denounce his irritable skin.

Fretted by his relatives he cannot be much of a giant.

Beauchamp looked from Dr. Shrapnel in his invalid's chair to his uncle Everard breathing robustly, and mixed his uncle's errors with those of the world which honoured and upheld him. His remainder of equability departed; his impatience increased. His appetite for work at Dr. Shrapnel's writing-desk was voracious. He was ready for any labour, the transcribing of papers, writing from dictation, whatsoever was of service to Lord Avonley's victim: and he was not like the Spartan boy with the wolf at his vitals; he betrayed it in the hue his uncle Everard detested, in a visible nervousness, and indulgence in fits of scorn. Sharp epigrams and notes of irony provoked his laughter more than fun. He seemed to acquiesce in some of the current contemporary despair of our immoveable England, though he winced at a satire on his country, and attempted to show that the dull dominant class of money-makers was the ruin of her. Wherever he stood to represent Dr. Shrapnel, as against Mr. Grancey Lespel on account of the Itchincope encroachments, he left a sting that spread the rumour of his having become not only a black torch of Radicalism—our modern provincial estate-holders and their wives bestow that reputation lightly—but a gentleman with the polish scratched off him in parts. And he, though individually he did not understand how there was to be game in the land if game-preserving was abolished, signed his name R. C. S. Nevil Beauchamp for

Dr. Shrapnel, in the communications directed to solicitors of the persecutors of poachers.

His behaviour to Grancey Lespel was eclipsed by his treatment of Captain Baskelett. Cecil had ample reason to suppose his cousin to be friendly with him. He himself had forgotten Dr. Shrapnel, and all other dissensions, in a supremely Christian spirit. He paid his cousin the compliment to think that he had done likewise. At Romfrey and in London he had spoken to Nevil of his designs upon the widow: Nevil said nothing against it: and it was under Mrs. Wardour-Devereux's eyes, and before a man named Lydiard, that, never calling to him to put him on his guard, Nevil fell foul of him with every capital charge that can be brought against a gentleman, and did so abuse, worry, and disgrace him as to reduce him to quit the house to avoid the scandal of a resort to a gentleman's last appeal in vindication of his character. Mrs. Devereux spoke of the terrible scene to Cecilia, and Lydiard to Miss Denham. The injured person communicated it to Lord Avonley, who told Colonel Halkett emphatically that his nephew Cecil deserved well of him in having kept command of his temper out of consideration for the family. There was a general murmur of the family over this incident. The widow was rich, and it ranked among the unwritten crimes against blood for one offshoot of a great house wantonly to thwart another in the wooing of her by humbling him in her presence, doing his utmost to expose him as a schemer, a culprit, and a poltroon.

Could it be that Beauchamp had reserved his wrath with his cousin to avenge Dr. Shrapnel upon him signally? Miss Denham feared her guardian was the cause. Lydiard was indefinitely of her opinion. The idea struck Cecilia Halkett, and as an example of Beauchamp's tenacity of purpose and sureness of aim it fascinated her. But Mrs.

Wardour-Devereux did not appear to share it. She objected to Beauchamp's intemperateness and unsparingness, as if she was for conveying a sisterly warning to Cecilia; and that being off her mind, she added, smiling a little and colouring a little: 'We learn only from men what men are.' How the scene commenced and whether it was provoked, she failed to recollect. She described Beauchamp as very self-contained in manner throughout: his tongue was the scorpion. Cecilia fancied he must have resembled his uncle Everard.

Cecilia was conquered, but unclaimed. While supporting and approving him in her heart she was dreading to receive some new problem of his conduct; and still while she blamed him for not seeking an interview with her, she liked him for this instance of delicacy in the present state of his relations with Lord Avonley.

A problem of her own conduct disturbed the young lady's clear conception of herself: and this was a ruffling of unfaithfulness in her love of Beauchamp, that was betrayed to her by her forgetfulness of him whenever she chanced to be with Seymour Austin. In Mr. Austin's company she recovered her forfeited repose, her poetry of life, her image of the independent Cecilia throned above our dust of battle, gazing on broad heaven. She carried the feeling so far that Blackburn Tuckham's enthusiasm for Mr. Austin gave him grace in her sight, and praise of her father's favourite from Mr. Austin's mouth made him welcome to her. The image of that grave capable head, dusty-grey about the temples, and the darkly sanguine face of the tried man, which was that of a seasoned warrior and inspired full trust in him, with his vivid look, his personal distinction, his plain devotion to the country's business, and the domestic solitude he lived in, admired, esteemed, loved perhaps, but unpartnered, was often her refuge and haven from tempestuous Beauchamp. She

could see in vision the pride of Seymour Austin's mate. It flushed her reflectively. Conquered but not claimed, Cecilia was like the frozen earth insensibly moving round to sunshine in nature, with one white flower in her breast: as innocent a sign of strong sweet blood as a woman may wear. She ascribed to that fair mate of Seymour Austin's many lofty charms of womanhood; above all, stateliness: her especial dream of an attainable superlative beauty in women. And supposing that lady to be accused of the fickle breaking of another love, who walked beside him, matched with his calm heart and one with him in counsel, would the accusation be repeated by them that beheld her husband? might it not rather be said that she had not deviated, but had only stepped higher? She chose no youth, no glistener, no idler: it was her soul striving upward to air like a seed in the earth that raised her to him: and she could say to the man once enchaining her: Friend, by the good you taught me I was led to this!

Cecilia's reveries fled like columns of mist before the gale when tidings reached her of a positive rupture between Lord Avonley and Nevil Beauchamp, and of the mandate to him to quit possession of Holdesbury and the London house within a certain number of days, because of his refusal to utter an apology to Mrs. Culling. Angrily on his behalf she prepared to humble herself to him. Louise Wardour-Devereux brought them to a meeting, at which Cecilia, with her heart in her hand, was icy. Mr. Lydiard, prompted by Mrs. Devereux, gave him better reasons for her singular coldness than Cecilia could give to herself, and some time afterward Beauchamp went to Mount Laurels, where Colonel Halkett mounted guard over his daughter, and behaved, to her thinking, cruelly. 'Now you have ruined yourself there 's nothing ahead for you but to go to the Admiralty and apply for a ship,' he said, sugaring the unkindness with the remark that the country

would be the gainer. He let fly a side-shot at London men calling themselves military men who sought to repair their fortunes by chasing wealthy widows, and complimented Beauchamp: 'You 're not one of that sort.'

Cecilia looked at Beauchamp stedfastly. 'Speak,' said the look.

But he, though not blind, was keenly wounded.

'Money I must have,' he said, half to the colonel, half to himself.

Colonel Halkett shrugged. Cecilia waited for a directness in Beauchamp's eyes.

Her father was too wary to leave them.

Cecilia's intuition told her that by leading to a discussion of politics, and adopting Beauchamp's views, she could kindle him. Why did she refrain? It was that the conquered young lady was a captive, not an ally. To touch the subject in cold blood, voluntarily to launch on those vexed waters, as if his cause were her heart's, as much as her heart was the man's, she felt to be impossible. He at the same time felt that the heiress, endowing him with money to speed the good cause, should be his match in ardour for it, otherwise he was but a common adventurer, winning and despoiling an heiress.

They met in London. Beauchamp had not vacated either Holdesbury or the town-house; he was defying his uncle Everard, and Cecilia thought with him that it was a wise temerity. She thought with him passively altogether. On this occasion she had not to wait for directness in his eyes; she had to parry it. They were at a dinner-party at Lady Elsea's, generally the last place for seeing Lord Palmet, but he was present, and arranged things neatly for them, telling Beauchamp that he acted under Mrs. Wardour-Devereux's orders. Never was an opportunity more propitious for a desperate lover. Had it been Renée next him, no petty worldly scruples of honour would have

held him back. And if Cecilia had spoken feelingly of Dr. Shrapnel, or had she simulated a thoughtful interest in his pursuits, his hesitations would have vanished. As it was, he dared to look what he did not permit himself to speak. She was nobly lovely, and the palpable envy of men around cried fool at his delays. Beggar and heiress! he said in his heart, to vitalize the three-parts fiction of the point of honour which Cecilia's beauty was fast submerging. When she was leaving he named a day for calling to see her. Colonel Halkett stood by, and she answered, 'Come.'

Beauchamp kept the appointment. Cecilia was absent.

He was unaware that her father had taken her to old Mrs. Beauchamp's death-bed. Her absence, after she had said, 'Come,' appeared a confirmation of her glacial manner when they met at the house of Mrs. Wardour-Devereux; and he charged her with waywardness. A wound of the same kind that we are inflicting is about the severest we can feel.

Beauchamp received intelligence of his venerable great-aunt's death from Blackburn Tuckham, and after the funeral he was informed that eighty thousand pounds had been bequeathed to him: a goodly sum of money for a gentleman recently beggared; yet, as the political enthusiast could not help reckoning (apart from a fervent sentiment of gratitude toward his benefactress), scarcely enough to do much more than start and push for three or more years a commanding daily newspaper, devoted to Radical interests, and to be entitled The Dawn.

True, he might now conscientiously approach the heiress, take her hand with an open countenance, and retain it.

Could he do so quite conscientiously? The point of honour had been centred in his condition of beggary. Something still was in his way. A quick spring of his

blood for air, motion, excitement, holiday freedom, sent his thoughts travelling whither they always shot away when his redoubtable natural temper broke loose.

In the case of any other woman than Cecilia Halkett he would not have been obstructed by the minor consideration as to whether he was wholly heart-free to ask her in marriage that instant; for there was no hindrance, and she was beautiful. She was exceedingly beautiful; and she was an unequalled heiress. She would be able with her wealth to float his newspaper, The Dawn, so desired of Dr. Shrapnel!—the best restorative that could be applied to him! Every temptation came supplicating him to take the step which indeed he wished for: one feeling opposed. He really respected Cecilia: it is not too much to say that he worshipped her with the devout worship rendered to the ideal Englishwoman by the heart of the nation. For him she was purity, charity, the keeper of the keys of whatsoever is held precious by men; she was a midway saint, a light between day and darkness, in whom the spirit in the flesh shone like the growing star amid thin sanguine colour, the sweeter, the brighter, the more translucent the longer known. And if the image will allow it, the nearer down to him the holier she seemed.

How offer himself when he was not perfectly certain that he was worthy of her?

Some jugglery was played by the adept male heart in these later hesitations. Up to the extent of his knowledge of himself, the man was fairly sincere. Passion would have sped him to Cecilia, but passion is not invariably love; and we know what it can be.

The glance he cast over the water at Normandy was withdrawn. He went to Bevisham to consult with Dr. Shrapnel about the starting of a weekly journal, instead of a daily, and a name for it—a serious question: for

though it is oftener weekly than daily that the dawn is visible in England, titles must not invite the public jest; and the glorious project of the daily DAWN was prudently abandoned for by-and-by. He thought himself rich enough to put a Radical champion weekly in the field: and this matter, excepting the title, was arranged in Bevisham. Thence he proceeded to Holdesbury, where he heard that the house, grounds, and farm were let to a tenant preparing to enter. Indifferent to the blow, he kept an engagement to deliver a speech at the great manufacturing town of Gunningham, and then went to London, visiting his uncle's town-house for recent letters. Not one was from Renée: she had not written for six weeks, not once for his thrice! A letter from Cecil Baskelett informed him that 'my lord' had placed the town-house at his disposal. Returning to dress for dinner on a thick and murky evening of February, Beauchamp encountered his cousin on the steps. He said to Cecil, 'I sleep here to-night: I leave the house to you to-morrow.'

Cecil struck out his underjaw to reply: 'Oh! good. You sleep here to-night. You are a fortunate man. I congratulate you. I shall not disturb you. I have just entered on my occupation of the house. I have my key. Allow me to recommend you to go straight to the drawing-room. And I may inform you that the Earl of Romfrey is at the point of death. My lord is at the castle.'

Cecil accompanied his descent of the steps with the humming of an opera melody. Beauchamp tripped into the hall-passage. A young maid-servant held the door open, and she accosted him: 'If you please, there is a lady up-stairs in the drawing-room; she speaks foreign English, sir.'

Beauchamp asked if the lady was alone, and not waiting for the answer, though he listened while writing, and

heard that she was heavily veiled, he tore a strip from his notebook, and carefully traced half-a-dozen telegraphic words to Mrs. Culling at Steynham. His rarely failing promptness, which was like an inspiration, to conceive and execute measures for averting peril, set him on the thought of possibly counteracting his cousin Cecil's malignant tongue by means of a message to Rosamund, summoning her by telegraph to come to town by the next train that night. He despatched the old woman keeping the house, as trustier than the young one, to the nearest office, and went up to the drawing-room, with a quick thumping heart that was nevertheless as little apprehensive of an especial trial and danger as if he had done nothing at all to obviate it. Indeed he forgot that he had done anything when he turned the handle of the drawing-room door.

CHAPTER XL

A TRIAL OF HIM

A LOW-BURNING lamp and fire cast a narrow ring on the shadows of the dusky London room. One of the window-blinds was drawn up. Beauchamp discerned a shape at that window, and the fear seized him that it might be Madame d'Auffray with evil news of Renée: but it was Renée's name he called. She rose from her chair, saying, 'I.'

She was trembling.

Beauchamp asked her whisperingly if she had come alone.

'Alone; without even a maid,' she murmured.

He pulled down the blind of the window exposing them to the square, and led her into the light to see her face

The dimness of light annoyed him, and the miserable reception of her; this English weather, and the gloomy house! And how long had she been waiting for him? and what was the mystery? Renée in England seemed magical; yet it was nothing stranger than an old dream realized. He wound up the lamp, holding her still with one hand. She was woefully pale; scarcely able to bear the increase of light.

'It is I who come to you': she was half audible.

'This time!' said he. 'You have been suffering?'

'No.'

Her tone was brief; not reassuring.

'You came straight to me?'

'Without a deviation that I know of.'

'From Tourdestelle?'

'You have not forgotten Tourdestelle, Nevil?'

The memory of it quickened his rapture in reading her features. It was his first love, his enchantress, who was here: and how? Conjectures shot through him like lightnings in the dark.

Irrationally, at a moment when reason stood in awe, he fancied it must be that her husband was dead. He forced himself to think it, and could have smiled at the hurry of her coming, one, without even a maid: and deeper down in him the devouring question burned which dreaded the answer.

But of old, in Normandy, she had pledged herself to join him with no delay when free, if ever free!

So now she was free.

One side of him glowed in illumination; the other was black as Winter night; but light subdues darkness; and in a situation like Beauchamp's, the blood is livelier than the prophetic mind.

'Why did you tell me to marry? What did that mean?' said he. 'Did you wish me to be the one in

chains? And you have come quite alone!—you will give me an account of everything presently:—You are here! in England! and what a welcome for you! You are cold.'

'I am warmly clad,' said Renée, suffering her hand to be drawn to his breast at her arm's-length, not bending with it.

Alive to his own indirectness, he was conscious at once of the slight sign of reservation, and said: 'Tell me . . .' and swerved sheer away from his question: 'how is Madame d'Auffray?'

'Agnès? I left her at Tourdestelle,' said Renée.

'And Roland? He never writes to me.'

'Neither he nor I write much. He is at the military camp of instruction in the North.'

'He will run over to us.'

'Do not expect it.'

'Why not?'

Renée sighed. 'We shall have to live longer than I look for . . .' she stopped.—'Why do you ask me why not? He is fond of us both, and sorry for us; but have you forgotten Roland that morning on the Adriatic?'

Beauchamp pressed her hand. The stroke of Then and Now rang in his breast like a bell instead of a bounding heart. Something had stunned his heart. He had no clear central feeling; he tried to gather it from her touch, from his joy in beholding her and sitting with her alone, from the grace of her figure, the wild sweetness of her eyes, and the beloved foreign lips bewitching him with their exquisite French and perfection of speech.

His nature was too prompt in responding to such a call on it for resolute warmth.

'If I had been firmer then, or you one year older!' he said.

'That girl in Venice had no courage,' said Renée.

She raised her head and looked about the room.

Her instinct of love sounded her lover through, and felt the deficiency or the contrariety in him, as surely as musical ears are pained by a discord that they require no touchstone to detect. Passion has the sensitiveness of fever, and is as cruelly chilled by a tepid air.

'Yes, a London house after Venice and Normandy!' said Beauchamp, following her look.

'Sicily: do not omit Syracuse; you were in your naval uniform: Normandy was our third meeting,' said Renée. 'This is the fourth. I should have reckoned that.'

'Why? Superstitiously?'

'We cannot be entirely wise when we have staked our fate. Sailors are credulous: you know them. Women are like them when they embark. . . . Three chances! Who can boast of so many, and expect one more! Will you take me to my hotel, Nevil?'

The fiction of her being free could not be sustained.

'Take you and leave you? I am absolutely at your command. But leave you? You are alone: and you have told me nothing.'

What was there to tell? The desperate act was apparent, and told all.

Renée's dark eyelashes lifted on him, and dropped.

'Then things are as I left them in Normandy?' said he.

She replied: 'Almost.'

He quivered at the solitary word; for his conscience was on edge. It ran the shrewdest irony through him, inexplicably. 'Almost': that is, 'with this poor difference of one person, now finding herself worthless, subtracted from the list; no other; it should be little to them as it is little to you': or, reversing it, the substance of the word became magnified and intensified by its humble slightness: 'Things are the same, but for the jewel of the province, a lustre of France, lured hither to her eclipse':

—meanings various, indistinguishable, thrilling and piercing sad as the half-tones humming round the note of a strung wire, which is a blunt single note to the common ear.

Beauchamp sprang to his feet and bent above her: 'You have come to me, for the love of me, to give yourself to me, and for ever, for good, till death? Speak, my beloved Renée.'

Her eyes were raised to his: 'You see me here. It is for you to speak.'

'I do. There 's nothing I ask for now—if the step can't be retrieved.'

'The step retrieved, my friend? There is no step backward in life.'

'I am thinking of you, Renée.'

'Yes, I know,' she answered hurriedly.

'If we discover that the step is a wrong one?' he pursued: 'why is there no step backward?'

'I am talking of women,' said Renée.

'Why not for women?'

'Honourable women, I mean,' said Renée.

Beauchamp inclined to forget his position in finding matter to contest.

Yet it is beyond contest that there is no step backward in life. She spoke well; better than he, and she won his deference by it. Not only she spoke better: she was truer, distincter, braver: and a man ever on the look-out for superior qualities, and ready to bow to them, could not refuse her homage. With that a saving sense of power quitted him.

'You wrote to me that you were unchanged, Nevil.'

'I am.'

'So, then, I came.'

His rejoinder was the dumb one, commonly eloquent and satisfactory.

Renée shut her eyes with a painful rigour of endurance. She opened them to look at him steadily.

The desperate act of her flight demanded immediate recognition from him in simple language and a practical seconding of it. There was the test.

'I cannot stay in this house, Nevil; take me away.'

She named her hotel in her French English, and the sound of it penetrated him with remorseful pity. It was for him, and of his doing, that she was in an alien land and an outcast!

'This house is wretched for you,' said he: 'and you must be hungry. Let me . . .'

'I cannot eat. I will ask you': she paused, drawing on her energies, and keeping down the throbs of her heart: 'this: do you love me?'

'I love you with all my heart and soul.'

'As in Normandy?'

'Yes.'

'In Venice?'

'As from the first, Renée! That I can swear.'

'Oaths are foolish. I meant to ask you—my friend, there is no question in my mind of any other woman: I see you love me: I am so used to consider myself the vain and cowardly creature, and you the boldest and faithfullest of men, that I could not abandon the habit if I would: I started confiding in you, sure that I should come to land. But I have to ask you:—to me you are truth: I have no claim on my lover for anything but the answer to this:—Am I a burden to you?'

His brows flew up in furrows. He drew a heavy breath, for never had he loved her more admiringly, and never on such equal terms. She was his mate in love and daring at least. A sorrowful comparison struck him, of a little boat sailing out to a vessel in deep seas and left to founder.

Without knotting his mind to acknowledge or deny the burden, for he could do neither, he stood silent, staring at her, not so much in weakness as in positive mental division. No, would be false; and Yes, not less false; and if the step was irretrievable, to say Yes would be to plunge a dagger in her bosom; but No was a vain deceit involving a double wreck. Assuredly a man standing against the world in a good cause, with a runaway wife on his hands, carries a burden, however precious it be to him.

A smile of her lips, parted in an anguish of expectancy, went to death over Renée's face. She looked at him tenderly. 'The truth,' she murmured to herself, and her eyelids fell.

'I am ready to bear anything,' said Beauchamp. 'I weigh what you ask me, that is all. You a burden to *me*? But when you ask me, you make me turn round and inquire how we stand before the world.'

'The world does not stone men,' said Renée.

'Can't I make you feel that I am not thinking of myself?' Beauchamp stamped in his extreme perplexity. He was gagged; he could not possibly talk to her, who had cast the die, of his later notions of morality and the world's dues, fees, and claims on us.

'No, friend, I am not complaining.' Renée put out her hand to him; with compassionate irony feigning to have heard excuses. 'What right have I to complain? I have not the sensation. I could not expect you to be everlastingly the sentinel of love. Three times I rejected you! Now that I have lost my father—Oh! poor father: I trifled with my lover, I tricked him that my father might live in peace. He is dead. I wished you to marry one of your own countrywomen, Nevil. You said it was impossible; and I, with my snake at my heart, and a husband grateful for nursing and whimpering to me for

his youth like a beggar on the road, I thought I owed you this debt of body and soul, to prove to you I have some courage; and for myself, to reward myself for my long captivity and misery with one year of life: and adieu to Roland my brother! adieu to friends! adieu to France! Italy was our home. I dreamed of one year in Italy; I fancied it might be two; more than that was unimaginable. Prisoners of long date do not hope; they do not calculate: air, light, they say; to breathe freely and drop down! They are reduced to the instincts of the beasts. I thought I might give you happiness, pay part of my debt to you. Are you remembering Count Henri? That paints what I was! I could fly to that for a taste of life! a dance to death! And again you ask: Why, if I loved you then, not turn to you in preference? No, you have answered it yourself, Nevil;—on that day in the boat, when generosity in a man so surprised me, it seemed a miracle to me; and it was, in its divination. How I thank my dear brother Roland for saving me the sight of you condemned to fight, against your conscience! He taught poor M. d'Henriel his lesson. You, Nevil, were my teacher. And see how it hangs: there was mercy for me in not having drawn down my father's anger on my heart's beloved. He loved you. He pitied us. He reproached himself. In his last days he was taught to suspect our story: perhaps from Roland; perhaps I breathed it without speaking. He called heaven's blessings on you. He spoke of you with tears, clutching my hand. He made me feel he would have cried out: "If I were leaving her with Nevil Beauchamp!" and "Beauchamp," I heard him murmuring once: "take down Froissart": he named a chapter. It was curious: if he uttered my name Renée, yours, "Nevil," soon followed. That was noticed by Roland. Hope for us, he could not have had; as little

as I! But we were his two: his children. I buried him—I thought he would know our innocence, and now pardon our love. I read your letters, from my name at the beginning, to yours at the end, and from yours back to mine, and between the lines, for any doubtful spot: and oh, rash! But I would not retrace the step for my own sake. I am certain of your love for me, though . . .' She paused: 'Yes, I am certain of it. And if I am a burden to you?'

'About as much as the air, which I can't do without since I began to breathe it,' said Beauchamp, more clear-mindedly now that he supposed he was addressing a mind, and with a peril to himself that escaped his vigilance. There was a secret intoxication for him already in the half-certainty that the step could not be retraced. The idea that he might reason with her, made her seductive to the heart and head of him.

'I am passably rich, Nevil,' she said. 'I do not care for money, except that it gives wings. Roland inherits the château in Touraine. I have one in Burgundy, and rentes and shares, my notary informs me.'

'I have money,' said he. His heart began beating violently. He lost sight of his intention of reasoning. 'Good God! if you were free!'

She faltered: 'At Tourdestelle . . .'

'Yes, and I *am* unchanged,' Beauchamp cried out. 'Your life there was horrible, and mine 's intolerable.' He stretched his arms cramped like the yawning of a wretch in fetters. That which he would and would not became so intervolved that he deemed it reasonable to instance their common misery as a ground for their union against the world. And what has that world done for us, that a joy so immeasurable should be rejected on its behalf? And what have we succeeded in doing, that the

childish effort to move it should be continued at such a cost?

For years, down to one year back, and less—yesterday, it could be said—all human blessedness appeared to him in the person of Renée, given him under any condition whatsoever. She was not less adorable now. In her decision, and a courage that he especially prized in women, she was a sweeter to him than when he was with her in France: too sweet to be looked at and refused.

'But we must live in England,' he cried abruptly out of his inner mind.

'Oh! not England, Italy, Italy!' Renée exclaimed: 'Italy, or Greece: anywhere where we have sunlight. Mountains and valleys are my dream. Promise it, Nevil. I will obey you; but this is my wish. Take me through Venice, that I may look at myself and wonder. We can live at sea, in a yacht; anywhere with you but in England. This country frowns on me; I can hardly fetch my breath here, I am suffocated. The people all walk in lines in England. Not here, Nevil! They are good people, I am sure; and it is your country: but their faces chill me, their voices grate; I should never understand them; they would be to me like their fogs eternally; and I to them? O me! it would be like hearing sentence in the dampness of the shroud perpetually. Again I say I do not doubt that they are very good: they claim to be; they judge others; they may know how to make themselves happy in their climate; it is common to most creatures to do so, or to imagine it. Nevil! not England!'

Truly 'the mad commander and his French marquise' of the Bevisham Election ballad would make a pretty figure in England!

His friends of his own class would be mouthing it. The story would be a dogging shadow of his public life, and,

quite as bad, a reflection on his party. He heard the yelping tongues of the cynics. He saw the consternation and grief of his old Bevisham hero, his leader and his teacher.

'Florence,' he said, musing on the prospect of exile and idleness: 'there 's a kind of society to be had in Florence.'

Renée asked him if he cared so much for society.

He replied that women must have it, just as men must have exercise.

'Old women, Nevil; intriguers, tattlers.'

'Young women, Renée.'

She signified no.

He shook the head of superior knowledge paternally.

Her instinct of comedy set a dimple faintly working in her cheek.

'Not if they love, Nevil.'

'At least,' said he, 'a man does not like to see the woman he loves banished by society and browbeaten.'

'Putting me aside, do you care for it, Nevil?'

'Personally not a jot.'

'I am convinced of that,' said Renée.

She spoke suspiciously sweetly, appearing perfect candour.

The change in him was perceptible to her. The nature of the change was unfathomable.

She tried her wits at the riddle. But though she could be an actress before him with little difficulty, the torment of her situation roused the fever within her at a bare effort to think acutely. Scarlet suffused her face: her brain whirled.

'Remember, dearest, I have but offered myself: you have your choice. I can pass on. Yes, I know well I speak to Nevil Beauchamp; you have drilled me to trust you and your word as a soldier trusts to his officer—once

a faint-hearted soldier! I need not remind you: fronting the enemy now, in hard truth. But I want your whole heart to decide. Give me no silly compassion! Would it have been better to me to have written to you? If I had written I should have clipped my glorious impulse, brought myself down to earth with my own arrow. I did not write, for I believed in you.'

So firm had been her faith in him that her visions of him on the passage to England had resolved all to one flash of blood-warm welcome awaiting her: and it says much for her natural generosity that the savage delicacy of a woman placed as she now was, did not take a mortal hurt from the apparent voidness of this home of his bosom. The passionate gladness of the lover was wanting: the chivalrous valiancy of manful joy.

Renée shivered at the cloud thickening over her new light of intrepid defiant life.

'Think it not improbable that I have weighed everything I surrender in quitting France,' she said.

Remorse wrestled with Beauchamp and flung him at her feet.

Renée remarked on the lateness of the hour.

He promised to conduct her to her hotel immediately.

'And to-morrow?' said Renée, simply, but breathlessly.

'To-morrow, let it be Italy! But first I telegraph to Roland and Tourdestelle. I can't run and hide. The step may be retrieved: or no, you are right; the step cannot, but the next to it may be stopped—that was the meaning I had! I 'll try. It 's cutting my hand off, tearing my heart out; but I will. O that you were free! You left your husband at Tourdestelle?'

'I presume he is there at present: he was in Paris when I left.'

Beauchamp spoke hoarsely and incoherently in contrast

with her composure: 'You will misunderstand me for a day or two, Renée. I say if you were free I should have my first love mine for ever. Don't fear me: I have no right even to press your fingers. He may throw you into my arms. Now you are the same as if you were in your own home: and you must accept me for your guide. By all I hope for in life, I 'll see you through it, and keep the dogs from barking, if I can. Thousands are ready to give tongue. And if they can get me in the character of a law-breaker!—I hear them.'

'Are you imagining, Nevil, that there is a possibility of my returning to him?'

'To your place in the world! You have not had to endure tyranny?'

'I should have had a certain respect for a tyrant, Nevil. At least I should have had an occupation in mocking him and conspiring against him. Tyranny! There would have been some amusement to me in that.'

'It was neglect.'

'If I could still charge it on neglect, Nevil! Neglect is very endurable. He rewards me for nursing him . . . he rewards me with a little persecution: wives should be flattered by it: it comes late.'

'What?' cried Beauchamp, oppressed and impatient.

Renée sank her voice:

Something in the run of the unaccented French: 'Son amour, mon ami': drove the significance of the bitterness of the life she had left behind her burningly through him. This was to have fled from a dragon! was the lover's thought: he perceived the motive of her flight: and it was a vindication of it that appealed to him irresistibly. The proposal for her return grew hideous: and this ever multiplying horror and sting of the love of a married woman came on him with a fresh throbbing shock, more venom.

He felt for himself now, and now he was full of feeling for her. Impossible that she should return! Tourdestelle shone to him like a gaping chasm of fire. And becoming entirely selfish he impressed his total abnegation of self upon Renée so that she could have worshipped him. A lover that was like a starry frost, froze her veins, bewildered her intelligence. She yearned for meridian warmth, for repose in a directing hand; and let it be hard as one that grasps a sword: what matter? unhesitatingness was the warrior virtue of her desire. And for herself the worst might happen if only she were borne along. Let her life be torn and streaming like the flag of battle, it must be forward to the end.

That was a quality of godless young heroism not unexhausted in Beauchamp's blood. Reanimated by him, she awakened his imagination of the vagrant splendours of existence and the rebel delights which have their own laws and 'nature' for an applauding mother. Radiant Alps rose in his eyes, and the morning born in the night: suns that from mountain and valley, over sea and desert, called on all earth to witness their death. The magnificence of the contempt of humanity posed before him superbly satanesque, grand as thunder among the crags: and it was not a sensual cry that summoned him from his pedlar labours, pack on back along the level road, to live and breathe deep, gloriously mated: Renée kindled his romantic spirit, and could strike the feeling into him that to be proud of his possession of her was to conquer the fretful vanity to possess. She was not a woman of wiles and lures.

Once or twice she consulted her watch: but as she professed to have no hunger, Beauchamp's entreaty to her to stay prevailed, and the subtle form of compliment to his knightly manliness in her remaining with him, gave him a new sense of pleasure that hung round her

companionable conversation, deepening the meaning of the words, or sometimes contrasting the sweet surface commonplace with the undercurrent of strangeness in their hearts, and the reality of a tragic position. Her musical volubility flowed to entrance and divert him, as it did.

Suddenly Beauchamp glanced upward.

Renée turned from a startled contemplation of his frown, and beheld Mrs. Rosamund Culling in the room.

CHAPTER XLI

A LAME VICTORY

THE intruder was not a person that had power to divide them; yet she came between their hearts with a touch of steel.

'I am here in obedience to your commands in your telegram of this evening,' Rosamund replied to Beauchamp's hard stare at her; she courteously spoke French, and acquitted herself demurely of a bow to the lady present.

Renée withdrew her serious eyes from Beauchamp. She rose and acknowledged the bow.

'It is my first visit to England, madame.'

'I could have desired, Madame la marquise, more agreeable weather for you.'

'My friends in England will dispel the bad weather for me, madame'; Renée smiled softly: 'I have been studying my French-English phrase-book, that I may learn how dialogues are conducted in your country to lead to certain ceremonies when old friends meet, and without my book I am at fault. I am longing to be embraced by you . . . if it will not be offending your rules?'

Rosamund succumbed to the seductive woman, whose gentle tooth bit through her tutored simplicity of manner and natural graciousness, administering its reproof, and eluding a retort or an excuse.

She gave the embrace. In doing so she fell upon her conscious awkwardness for an expression of reserve that should be as good as irony for irony, though where Madame de Rouaillout's irony lay, or whether it was irony at all, our excellent English dame could not have stated, after the feeling of indignant prudery responding to it so guiltily had subsided.

Beauchamp asked her if she had brought servants with her; and it gratified her to see that he was no actor fitted to carry a scene through in virtue's name and vice's mask with this actress.

She replied, 'I have brought a man and a maid-servant. The establishment will be in town the day after to-morrow, in time for my lord's return from the Castle.'

'You can have them up to-morrow morning.'

'I could,' Rosamund admitted the possibility. Her idolatry of him was tried on hearing him press the hospitality of the house upon Madame de Rouaillout, and observing the lady's transparent feint of a reluctant yielding. For the voluble Frenchwoman scarcely found a word to utter: she protested languidly that she preferred the independence of her hotel, and fluttered a singular look at him, as if overcome by his vehement determination to have her in the house. Undoubtedly she had a taking face and style. His infatuation, nevertheless, appeared to Rosamund utter dementedness, considering this woman's position, and Cecilia Halkett's beauty and wealth, and that the house was no longer at his disposal. He was really distracted, to judge by his forehead, or else he was over-acting his part.

The absence of a cook in the house, Rosamund

remarked, must prevent her from seconding Captain Beauchamp's invitation.

He turned on her witheringly. 'The telegraph will do that. You're in London; cooks can be had by dozens. Madame de Rouaillout is alone here; she has come to see a little of England, and you will do the honours of the house.'

'M. le marquis is not in London?' said Rosamund, disregarding the dumb imprecation she saw on Beauchamp's features.

'No, madame, my husband is not in London,' Renée rejoined collectedly.

'See to the necessary comforts of the house instantly,' said Beauchamp, and telling Renée, without listening to her, that he had to issue orders, he led Rosamund, who was out of breath at the effrontery of the pair, toward the door. 'Are you blind, ma'am? Have you gone foolish? What should I have sent for you for, but to protect her? I see your mind; and off with the prude, pray! Madame will have my room; clear away every sign of me there. I sleep out; I can find a bed anywhere. And bolt and chain the house-door to-night against Cecil Baskelett; he informs me that he has taken possession.'

Rosamund's countenance had become less austere.

'Captain Baskelett!' she exclaimed, leaning to Beauchamp's views on the side of her animosity to Cecil; 'he has been promised by his uncle the use of a set of rooms during the year, when the mistress of the house is not in occupation. I stipulated expressly that he was to see you and suit himself to your convenience, and to let me hear that you and he had agreed to an arrangement, before he entered the house. He has no right to be here, and I shall have no hesitation in locking him out.'

Beauchamp bade her go, and not be away more than

five minutes; and then he would drive to the hotel for the luggage.

She scanned him for a look of ingenuousness that might be trusted, and laughed in her heart at her credulity for expecting it of a man in such a case. She saw Renée sitting stonily, too proudly self-respecting to put on a mask of flippant ease. These lovers might be accomplices in deceiving her; they were not happy ones, and that appeared to her to be some assurance that she did well in obeying him.

Beauchamp closed the door on her. He walked back to Renée with a thoughtful air that was consciously acted; his only thought being—now she knows me!

Renée looked up at him once. Her eyes were unaccusing, unquestioning.

With the violation of the secresy of her flight she had lost her initiative and her intrepidity. The world of human eyes glared on her through the windows of the two she had been exposed to, paralyzing her brain and caging her spirit of revolt. That keen wakefulness of her self-defensive social instinct helped her to an understanding of her lover's plan to preserve her reputation, or rather to give her a corner of retreat in shielding the worthless thing—twice detested as her cloak of slavery coming from him! She comprehended no more. She was a house of nerves crowding in against her soul like fiery thorns, and had no space within her torture for a sensation of gratitude or suspicion; but feeling herself hurried along at lightning speed to some dreadful shock, her witless imagination apprehended it in his voice: not what he might say, only the sound. She feared to hear him speak, as the shrinking ear fears a thunder at the cavity; yet suspense was worse than the downward-driving silence.

The pang struck her when he uttered some words about Mrs. Culling, and protection, and Roland.

She thanked him.

So have common executioners been thanked by queenly ladies baring their necks to the axe.

He called up the pain he suffered to vindicate him; and it was really an agony of a man torn to pieces.

'I have done the best.'

This dogged and stupid piece of speech was pitiable to hear from Nevil Beauchamp.

'You think so?' said she; and her glass-like voice rang a tremour in its mildness that swelled through him on the plain submissive note, which was more assent than question.

'I am sure of it. I believe it. I see it. At least I hope so.'

'We are chiefly led by hope,' said Renée.

'At least, if not!' Beauchamp cried. 'And it 's not too late. I have no right—— I do what I can. I am at your mercy. Judge me later. If I am ever to know what happiness is, it will be with you. It 's not too late either way. There is Roland—my brother as much as if you were my wife!'

He begged her to let him have Roland's exact address.

She named the regiment, the corps d'armée, the postal town, and the department.

'Roland will come at a signal,' he pursued; 'we are not bound to consult others.'

Renée formed the French word of 'we' on her tongue.

He talked of Roland and Roland, his affection for him as a brother and as a friend, and Roland's love of them both.

'It is true,' said Renée.

'We owe him this; he represents your father.'

'All that you say is true, my friend.'

'Thus, you have come on a visit to madame, your old friend here—oh! your hand. What have I done?'

Renée motioned her hand as if it were free to be taken, and smiled faintly to make light of it, but did not give it.

'If you had been widowed!' he broke down to the lover again.

'That man is attached to the remnant of his life: I could not wish him dispossessed of it,' said Renée.

'Parted! who parts us? It 's for a night. To-morrow!'

She breathed: 'To-morrow.'

To his hearing it craved an answer. He had none. To talk like a lover, or like a man of honour, was to lie. Falsehood hemmed him in to the narrowest ring that ever statue stood on, if he meant to be stone.

'That woman will be returning,' he muttered, frowning at the vacant door. 'I could lay out my whole life before your eyes, and show you I am unchanged in my love of you since the night when Roland and I walked on the Piazzetta . . .'

'Do not remind me; let those days lie black!' A sympathetic vision of her maiden's tears on the night of wonderful moonlight when, as it seemed to her now, San Giorgio stood like a dark prophet of her present abasement and chastisement, sprang tears of a different character, and weak as she was with her soul's fever and for want of food, she was piteously shaken. She said with some calmness: 'It is useless to look back. I have no reproaches but for myself. Explain nothing to me. Things that are not comprehended by one like me are riddles I must put aside. I know where I am: I scarcely know more. Here is madame.'

The door had not opened, and it did not open immediately.

Beauchamp had time to say, 'Believe in me.' Even that was false to his own hearing, and in a struggle with the painful impression of insincerity which was denied and

scorned by his impulse to fling his arms round her and have her his for ever, he found himself deferentially accepting her brief directions concerning her boxes at the hotel, with Rosamund Culling to witness.

She gave him her hand.

He bowed over the fingers. 'Until to-morrow, madame.'

'Adieu!' said Renée.

CHAPTER XLII

THE TWO PASSIONS

The foggy February night refreshed his head, and the business of fetching the luggage from the hotel—a commission that necessitated the delivery of his card and some very commanding language—kept his mind in order. Subsequently he drove to his cousin Baskelett's Club, where he left a short note to say the house was engaged for the night and perhaps a week further. Concise, but sufficient: and he stated a hope to his cousin that he would not be inconvenienced. This was courteous.

He had taken a bed at Renée's hotel, after wresting her boxes from the vanquished hotel proprietor, and lay there, hearing the clear sound of every little sentence of hers during the absence of Rosamund: her '*Adieu,*' and the strange '*Do you think so?*' and '*I know where I am; I scarcely know more.*' Her eyes and their darker lashes, and the fitful little sensitive dimples of a smile without joy, came with her voice, but hardened to an aspect unlike her. Not a word could he recover of what she had spoken before Rosamund's intervention. He fancied she must have related details of her journey. Especially there must have been mention, he thought, of her drive to the station from

Tourdestelle; and this flashed on him the scene of his ride to the château, and the meeting her on the road, and the white light on the branching river, and all that was Renée in the spirit of the place she had abandoned for him, believing in him. She had proved that she believed in him. What in the name of sanity had been the meaning of his language? and what was it between them that arrested him and caused him to mumble absurdly of 'doing best,' when in fact he was her bondman, rejoiced to be so, by his pledged word? and when she, for some reason that he was sure she had stated, though he could recollect no more than the formless hideousness of it, was debarred from returning to Tourdestelle?

He tossed in his bed as over a furnace, in the extremity of perplexity of one accustomed to think himself ever demonstrably in the right, and now with his whole nature in insurrection against that legitimate claim. It led him to accuse her of a want of passionate warmth, in her not having supplicated and upbraided him—not behaving theatrically, in fine, as the ranting pen has made us expect of emergent ladies that they will naturally do. Concerning himself, he thought commendingly, a tear would have overcome him. She had not wept. The kaleidoscope was shaken in his fragmentary mind, and she appeared thrice adorable for this noble composure, he brutish.

Conscience and reason had resolved to a dead weight in him, like an inanimate force, governing his acts despite the man, while he was with Renée. Now his wishes and waverings conjured up a semblance of a conscience and much reason to assure him that he had done foolishly as well as unkindly, most unkindly: that he was even the ghastly spectacle of a creature attempting to be more than he can be. Are we never to embrace our inclinations? Are the laws regulating an old dry man like his teacher and guide to be the same for the young and vigorous?

The Bridge at Barnsdon

returning to Tourdestelle?

The Bridge at Burslem

Is a good gift to be refused? And this was his first love! The brilliant Renée, many-hued as a tropic bird! his lady of shining grace, with her sole fault of want of courage devotedly amended! his pupil, he might say, of whom he had foretold that she must come to such a pass, at the same time prefixing his fidelity. And he was handing her over knowingly to one kind of wretchedness—'*son amour, mon ami*,' shot through him, lighting up the gulfs of a mind in wreck;—and one kind of happiness could certainly be promised her!

All these and innumerable other handsome pleadings of the simulacra of the powers he had set up to rule, were crushed at daybreak by the realities in a sense of weight that pushed him mechanically on. He telegraphed to Roland, and mentally gave chase to the message to recall it.—The slumberer roused in darkness by the relentless insane-seeming bell which hales him to duty, melts at the charms of sleep, and feels that logic is with him in his preference of his pillow; but the tireless revolving world outside, nature's pitiless antagonist, has hung one of its balances about him, and his actions are directed by the state of the scales, wherein duty weighs deep and desireability swings like a pendant doll: so he throws on his harness, astounded, till his blood quickens with work, at the round of sacrifices demanded of nature: which is indeed curious considering what we are taught here and there as to the infallibility of our august mother. Well, the world of humanity had done this for Beauchamp. His afflicted historian is compelled to fling his net among prosaic similitudes for an illustration of one thus degradedly in its grip. If he had been off with his love like the rover!—why, then the Muse would have loosened her lap like May showering flower-buds, and we might have knocked great nature up from her sleep to embellish his desperate proceedings with hurricanes to be danced over, to say

nothing of imitative spheres dashing out into hurly-burly after his example.

Conscious rectitude, too, after the pattern of the well-behaved Æneas quitting the fair bosom of Carthage in obedience to the Gods, for an example to his Roman progeny, might have stiffened his backbone and put a crown upon his brows. It happened with him that his original training rather imposed the idea that he was a figure to be derided. The approval of him by the prudent was a disgust, and by the pious tasteless. He had not any consolation in reverting to Dr. Shrapnel's heavy puritanism. On the contrary, such a general proposition as that of the sage of Bevisham could not for a moment stand against the pathetic special case of Renée: and as far as Beauchamp's active mind went, he was for demanding that Society should take a new position in morality, considerably broader, and adapted to very special cases.

Nevertheless he was hardly grieved in missing Renée at Rosamund's breakfast-table. Rosamund informed him that Madame de Rouaillout's door was locked. Her particular news for him was of a disgraceful alarum raised by Captain Baskelett in the night, to obtain admission; and of an interview she had with him in the early morning, when he subjected her to great insolence. Beauchamp's attention was drawn to her repetition of the phrase 'mistress of the house.' However, she did him justice in regard to Renée, and thoroughly entered into the fiction of Renée's visit to her as her guest: he passed over everything else.

To stop the mouth of a scandal-monger, he drove full speed to Cecil's Club, where he heard that the captain had breakfasted and had just departed for Romfrey Castle. He followed to the station. The train had started. So mischief was rolling in that direction.

Late at night Rosamund was allowed to enter the chill

unlighted chamber, where the unhappy lady had been lying for hours in the gloom of a London Winter's daylight and gaslight.

'Madame de Rouaillout is indisposed with headache,' was her report to Beauchamp.

The conventional phraseology appeased him, though he saw his grief behind it.

Presently he asked if Renée had taken food.

'No: you know what a headache is,' Rosamund replied.

It is true that we do not care to eat when we are in pain.

He asked if she looked ill.

'She will not have lights in the room,' said Rosamund.

Piecemeal he gained the picture of Renée in an image of the death within which welcomed a death without.

Rosamund was impatient with him for speaking of medical aid. These men! She remarked very honestly: 'Oh, no; doctors are not needed.'

'Has she mentioned me?'

'Not once.'

'Why do you swing your watch-chain, ma'am?' cried Beauchamp, bounding off his chair.

He reproached her with either pretending to indifference or feeling it; and then insisted on his privilege of going up-stairs—accompanied by her, of course; and then it was to be only to the door; then an answer to a message was to satisfy him.

'Any message would trouble her: what message would you send?' Rosamund asked him.

The weighty and the trivial contended; no fitting message could be thought of.

'You are unused to real suffering—that is for women! —and want to be doing instead of enduring,' said Rosamund.

She was beginning to put faith in the innocence of these

two mortally sick lovers. Beauchamp's outcries against himself gave her the shadows of their story. He stood in tears—a thing to see to believe of Nevil Beauchamp; and plainly he did not know it, or else he would have taken her advice to him to leave the house at an hour that was long past midnight. Her method for inducing him to go was based on her intimate knowledge of him: she made as if to soothe and kiss him compassionately.

In the morning there was a flying word from Roland, on his way to England. Rosamund tempered her report of Renée by saying of her, that she was very quiet. He turned to the window.

'Look, what a climate ours is!' Beauchamp abused the persistent fog. 'Dull, cold, no sky, a horrible air to breathe! This is what she has come to! Has she spoken of me yet?'

'No.'

'Is she dead silent?'

'She answers, if I speak to her.'

'I believe, ma'am,' said Beauchamp, 'that we are the coldest-hearted people in Europe.'

Rosamund did not defend us, or the fog. Consequently nothing was left for him to abuse but himself. In that she tried to moderate him, and drew forth a torrent of self-vituperation, after which he sank into the speechless misery he had been evading; until sophistical fancy, another evolution of his nature, persuaded him that Roland, seeing Renée, would for love's sake be friendly to them.

'I should have told you, Nevil, by the way, that the earl is dead,' said Rosamund.

'Her brother will be here to-day; he can't be later than the evening,' said Beauchamp. 'Get her to eat, ma'am; you must. Command her to eat. This terrible starvation!'

'You ate nothing yourself, Nevil, all day yesterday.'

He surveyed the table. 'You have your cook in town, I see. Here 's a breakfast to feed twenty hungry families in Spitalfields. Where does the mass of meat go? One excess feeds another. You 're overdone with servants. Gluttony, laziness, and pilfering come of your host of unmanageable footmen and maids; you stuff them, and wonder they 're idle and immoral. If—I suppose I must call him the earl now, or Colonel Halkett, or any one of the army of rich men, hear of an increase of the income-tax, or some poor wretch hints at a sliding scale of taxation, they yell as if they were thumb-screwed: but five shillings in the pound goes to the kitchen as a matter of course—to puff those pompous idiots! and the parsons, who should be preaching against this sheer waste of food and perversion of the strength of the nation, as a public sin, are maundering about schism. There 's another idle army! Then we have artists, authors, lawyers, doctors—the honourable professions! all hanging upon wealth, all apeing the rich, and all bearing upon labour! it 's incubus on incubus. In point of fact, the rider 's too heavy for the horse in England.'

He began to nibble at bread.

Rosamund pushed over to him a plate of the celebrated Steynham pie, of her own invention, such as no house in the county of Sussex could produce or imitate.

'What would you have the parsons do?' she said.

'Take the rich by the throat and show them in the kitchen-mirror that they 're swine running down to the sea with a devil in them.' She had set him off again, but she had enticed him to eating. 'Pooh! it has all been said before. Stones are easier to move than your English. May I be forgiven for saying it! an invasion is what they want to bring them to their senses. I 'm sick of the work. Why should I be denied

—am I to kill the woman I love that I may go on hammering at them? Their idea of liberty is, an evasion of public duty. Dr. Shrapnel 's right—it 's a money-logged Island! Men like the Earl of Romfrey, who have never done work in their days except to kill bears and birds, I say they 're stifled by wealth: and he at least would have made an Admiral of mark, or a General: not of much value, but useful in case of need. But he, like a pretty woman, was under no obligation to contribute more than an ornamental person to the common good. As to that, we count him by tens of thousands now, and his footmen and maids by hundreds of thousands. The rich love the nation through their possessions; otherwise they have no country. If they loved the country they would care for the people. Their hearts are eaten up by property. I am bidden to hold my tongue because I have no knowledge. When men who have this "knowledge" will go down to the people, speak to them, consult and argue with them, and come into suitable relations with them—I don't say of lords and retainers, but of knowers and doers, leaders and followers—out of consideration for public safety, if not for the common good, I shall hang back gladly; though I won't hear misstatements. My fault is, that I am too moderate. I should respect myself more if I deserved their hatred. This flood of luxury, which is, as Dr. Shrapnel says, the body's drunkenness and the soul's death, cries for execration. I 'm too moderate. But I shall quit the country: I 've no place here.'

Rosamund ahemed. 'France, Nevil? I should hardly think that France would please you, in the present state of things over there.'

Half cynically, with great satisfaction, she had watched him fretting at the savoury morsels of her pie with a fork like a sparrow-beak during the monologue that would

have been so dreary to her but for her appreciation of the wholesome effect of the letting off of steam, and her admiration of the fire of his eyes. After finishing his plate he had less the look of a ship driving on to reefs—one of his images of the country. He called for claret and water, sighing as he munched bread in vast portions, evidently conceiving that to eat unbuttered bread was to abstain from luxury. He praised passingly the quality of the bread. It came from Steynham, and so did the milk and cream, the butter, chicken and eggs. He was good enough not to object to the expenditure upon the transmission of the accustomed dainties. Altogether the gradual act of nibbling had conduced to his eating remarkably well—royally. Rosamund's more than half-cynical ideas of men, and her custom of wringing unanimous verdicts from a jury of temporary impressions, inclined her to imagine him a lover that had not to be so very much condoled with, and a politician less alarming in practice than in theory:—somewhat a gentleman of domestic tirades on politics: as it is observed of your generous young Radical of birth and fortune, that he will become on the old high road to a round Conservatism.

He pitched one of the morning papers to the floor in disorderly sheets, muttering: 'So they 're at me!'

'Is Dr. Shrapnel better?' she asked. 'I hold to a good appetite as a sign of a man's recovery.'

Beauchamp was confronting the fog at the window. He swung round: 'Dr. Shrapnel is better. He has a particularly clever young female cook.'

'Ah! then . . .'

'Yes, then, naturally! He would naturally hasten to recover to partake of the viands, ma'am.'

Rosamund murmured of her gladness that he should be able to enjoy them.

'Oddly enough, he is not an eater of meat,' said Beauchamp.

'A vegetarian!'

'I beg you not to mention the fact to my lord. You see, you yourself can scarcely pardon it. He does not exclude flesh from his table. Blackburn Tuckham dined there once. "You are a thorough revolutionist, Dr. Shrapnel," he observed. The doctor does not exclude wine, but he does not drink it. Poor Tuckham went away entirely opposed to a Radical he could not even meet as a boonfellow. I begged him not to mention the circumstances, as I have begged you. He pledged me his word to that effect solemnly; he correctly felt that if the truth were known, there would be further cause for the reprobation of the man who had been his host.'

'And that poor girl, Nevil?'

'Miss Denham? She contracted the habit of eating meat at school, and drinking wine in Paris, and continues it, occasionally. Now run up-stairs. Insist on food. Inform Madame de Rouaillout that her brother M. le comte de Croisnel will soon be here, and should not find her ill. Talk to her as you women can talk. Keep the blinds down in her room; light a dozen wax-candles. Tell her I have no thought but of her. It 's a lie: of no woman but of her: that you may say. But that you can't say. You can say I am devoted—ha, what stuff! I 've only to open my mouth!—say nothing of me: let her think the worst—unless it comes to a question of her life: then be a merciful good woman . . .' He squeezed her fingers, communicating his muscular tremble to her sensitive woman's frame, and electrically convincing her that he was a lover.

She went up-stairs. In ten minutes she descended, and found him pacing up and down the hall. 'Madame de Rouaillout is much the same,' she said. He nodded,

looked up the stairs, and about for his hat and gloves, drew on the gloves, fixed the buttons, blinked at his watch, and settled his hat as he was accustomed to wear it, all very methodically, and talking rapidly, but except for certain precise directions, which were not needed by so careful a housekeeper and nurse as Rosamund was known to be, she could not catch a word of meaning. He had some appointment, it seemed; perhaps he was off for a doctor—a fresh instance of his masculine incapacity to understand patient endurance. After opening the house-door, and returning to the foot of the stairs, listening and sighing, he disappeared.

It struck her that he was trying to be two men at once.

The litter of newspaper sheets in the morning-room brought his exclamation to her mind: 'They 're at me!' Her eyes ran down the columns, and were seized by the print of his name in large type. A leading article was devoted to Commander's Beauchamp's recent speech delivered in the great manufacturing town of Gunningham, at a meeting under the presidency of the mayor, and his replies to particular questions addressed to him; one being, what right did he conceive himself to have to wear the Sovereign's uniform in professing Republican opinions? Rosamund winced for her darling during her first perusal of the article. It was of the sarcastically caressing kind, masterly in ease of style, as the flourish of the executioner well may be with poor Bare-back hung up to a leisurely administration of the scourge. An allusion to 'Jack on shore' almost persuaded her that his uncle Everard had inspired the writer of the article. Beauchamp's reply to the question of his loyalty was not quoted: he was, however, complimented on his frankness. At the same time he was assured that his error lay in a too great proneness to make distinctions, and that there was no distinction between sovereign and country in a loyal and

contented land, which could thank him for gallant services in war, while taking him for the solitary example to be cited at the present period of the evils of a comparatively long peace.

'Doubtless the tedium of such a state to a man of the temperament of the gallant commander,' etc.,—the termination of the article was indulgent. Rosamund recurred to the final paragraph for comfort, and though she loved Beauchamp, the test of her representative feminine sentiment regarding his political career, when personal feeling on his behalf had subsided, was, that the writer of the article must have received an intimation to deal both smartly and forbearingly with the offender: and from whom but her lord? Her notions of the conduct of the Press were primitive. In a summary of the article Beauchamp was treated as naughty boy, formerly brave boy, and likely by-and-by to be good boy. Her secret heart would have spoken similarly, with more emphasis on the flattering terms.

A telegram arrived from her lord. She was bidden to have the house clear for him by noon of the next day.

How could that be done?

But to write blankly to inform the Earl of Romfrey that he was excluded from his own house was another impossibility.

'Hateful man!' she apostrophized Captain Baskelett, and sat down, supporting her chin in a prolonged meditation.

The card of a French lady, bearing the name of Madame d'Auffray, was handed to her.

Beauchamp had gone off to his friend Lydiard, to fortify himself in his resolve to reply to that newspaper article by eliciting counsel to the contrary. Phrase by phrase he fought through the first half of his composition of the

reply against Lydiard, yielding to him on a point or two of literary judgement, only the more vehemently to maintain his ideas of discretion, which were, that he would not take shelter behind a single subterfuge; that he would try this question nakedly, though he should stand alone; that he would stake his position on it, and establish his right to speak his opinions: and as for unseasonable times, he protested it was the cry of a gorged middle-class, frightened of further action, and making snug with compromise. Would it be a seasonable time when there was uproar? Then it would be a time to be silent on such themes: they could be discussed calmly now, and without danger; and whether he was hunted or not, he cared nothing. He declined to consider the peculiar nature of Englishmen: they must hear truth or perish.

Knowing the difficulty once afflicting Beauchamp in the art of speaking on politics tersely, Lydiard was rather astonished at his well-delivered cannonade; and he fancied that his modesty had been displaced by the new acquirement; not knowing the nervous fever of his friend's condition, for which the rattle of speech was balm, and contention a native element, and the assumption of truth a necessity. Beauchamp hugged his politics like some who show their love of the pleasures of life by taking to them angrily. It was all he had: he had given up all for it. He forced Lydiard to lay down his pen and walk back to the square with him, and went on arguing, interjecting, sneering, thumping the old country, raising and oversetting her, treating her alternately like a disrespected grandmother, and like a woman anciently beloved; as a dead lump, and as a garden of seeds; reviewing prominent political men, laughing at the dwarf-giants; finally casting anchor on a Mechanics' Institute that he had recently heard of, where working men met weekly for the purpose of reading the British poets.

'That 's the best thing I 've heard of late,' he said, shaking Lydiard's hand on the door-steps.

'Ah! you 're Commander Beauchamp; I think I know you. I 've seen you on a platform,' cried a fresh-faced man in decent clothes, halting on his way along the pavement; 'and if you were in your uniform, you damned Republican dog! I 'd strip you with my own hands, for the disloyal scoundrel you are, with your pimping Republicanism and capsizing everything in a country like Old England. It 's the cat-o'-nine-tails you want, and the bosen to lay on; and I 'd do it myself. And mind me, when next I catch sight of you in blue and gold lace, I 'll compel you to show cause why you wear it, and prove your case, or else I 'll make a Cupid of you, and no joke about it. I don't pay money for a nincompoop to outrage my feelings of respect and loyalty, when he 's in my pay, d' ye hear? You 're in my pay: and you do your duty, or I 'll kick ye out of it. It 's no empty threat. You look out for your next public speech, if it 's anywhere within forty mile of London. Get along.'

With a scowl, and a very ugly 'yah!' worthy of cannibal jaws, the man passed off.

Beauchamp kept eye on him. 'What class does a fellow like that come of?'

'He 's a harmless enthusiast,' said Lydiard. 'He has been reading the article, and has got excited over it.'

'I wish I had the fellow's address.' Beauchamp looked wistfully at Lydiard, but he did not stimulate the generous offer to obtain it for him. Perhaps it was as well to forget the fellow.

'You see the effect of those articles,' he said.

'You see what I mean by unseasonable times,' Lydiard retorted.

'He didn't talk like a tradesman,' Beauchamp mused.

'He may be one, for all that. It 's better to class him as an enthusiast.'

'An enthusiast!' Beauchamp stamped: 'for what?'

'For the existing order of things; for his beef and ale; for the titles he is accustomed to read in the papers. You don't study your countrymen.'

'I 'd study that fellow, if I had the chance.'

'You would probably find him one of the emptiest, with a rather worse temper than most of them.'

Beauchamp shook Lydiard's hand, saying, 'The widow?'

'There 's no woman like her!'

'Well, now you 're free—why not? I think I put one man out of the field.'

'Too early! Besides——'

'Repeat that, and you may have to say too late.'

'When shall you go down to Bevisham?'

'When? I can't tell: when I 've gone through fire. There never was a home for me like the cottage, and the old man, and the dear good girl—the best of girls! if you hadn't a little spoilt her with your philosophy of the two sides of the case.'

'I 've not given her the brains.'

'She 's always doubtful of doing, doubtful of action: she has no will. So she is fatalistic, and an argument between us ends in her submitting, as if she must submit to me, because I 'm overbearing, instead of accepting the fact.'

'She feels your influence.'

'She 's against the publication of The Dawn—for the present. It 's an "unseasonable time." I argue with her: I don't get hold of her mind a bit; but at last she says, "very well." She has your head.'

And you have her heart, Lydiard could have rejoined.

They said good-bye, neither of them aware of the other's task of endurance.

As they were parting, Beauchamp perceived his old comrade Jack Wilmore walking past.

'Jack!' he called.

Wilmore glanced round. 'How do you do, Beauchamp?'

'Where are you off to, Jack?'

'Down to the Admiralty. I 'm rather in a hurry; I have an appointment.'

'Can 't you stop just a minute?'

'I 'm afraid I can't. Good morning.'

It was incredible; but this old friend, the simplest heart alive, retreated without a touch of his hand, and with a sorely wounded air.

'That newspaper article appears to have been generally read,' Beauchamp said to Lydiard, who answered:—

'The article did not put the idea of you into men's minds, but gave tongue to it: you may take it for an instance of the sagacity of the Press.'

'You wouldn't take that man and me to have been messmates for years! Old Jack Wilmore! Don't go, Lydiard.'

Lydiard declared that he was bound to go: he was engaged to read Italian for an hour with Mrs. Wardour-Devereux.

'Then go, by all means,' Beauchamp dismissed him.

He felt as if he had held a review of his friends and enemies on the door-step, and found them of one colour. If it was an accident befalling him in a London square during a space of a quarter of an hour, what of the sentiments of universal England? Lady Barbara's elopement with Lord Alfred last year did not rouse much execration; hardly worse than gossip and compassion. Beauchamp drank a great deal of bitterness from his reflections.

They who provoke huge battles, and gain but lame victories over themselves, insensibly harden to the habit of distilling sour thoughts from their mischances and from most occurrences. So does the world they combat win on them.

'For,' says Dr. Shrapnel, 'the world and nature, which are opposed in relation to our vital interests, each agrees to demand of us a perfect victory, on pain otherwise of proving it a stage performance; and the victory over the world, as over nature, is over self: and this victory lies in yielding perpetual service to the world, and none to nature: for the world has to be wrought out, nature to be subdued.'

The interior of the house was like a change of elements to Beauchamp. He had never before said to himself, 'I have done my best, and I am beaten!' Outside of it, his native pugnacity had been stimulated; but here, within the walls where Renée lay silently breathing, barely breathing, it might be dying, he was overcome, and left it to circumstance to carry him to a conclusion. He went up-stairs to the drawing-room, where he beheld Madame d'Auffray in conversation with Rosamund.

'I was assured by Madame la Comtesse that I should see you to-day,' the French lady said as she swam to meet him; 'it is a real pleasure': and pressing his hand she continued, 'but I fear you will be disappointed of seeing my sister. She would rashly try your climate at its worst period. Believe me, I do not join in decrying it, except on her account: I could have forewarned her of an English Winter and early Spring. You know her impetuosity; suddenly she decided on accepting the invitation of Madame la Comtesse; and though I have no fears of her health, she is at present a victim of the inclement weather.'

'You have seen her, madame?' said Beauchamp. So well had the clever lady played the dupe that he forgot there was a part for him to play. Even the acquiescence of Rosamund in the title of countess bewildered him.

'Madame d'Auffray has been sitting for an hour with Madame de Rouaillout,' said Rosamund.

He spoke of Roland's coming.

'Ah?' said Madame d'Auffray, and turned to Rosamund: 'you have determined to surprise us: then you will have a gathering of the whole family in your hospitable house, Madame la Comtesse.'

'If M. la Marquis will do it that honour, madame.'

'My brother is in London,' Madame d'Auffray said to Beauchamp.

The shattering blow was merited by one who could not rejoice that he had acted rightly.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE EARL OF ROMFREY AND THE COUNTESS

An extraordinary telegraphic message, followed by a still more extraordinary letter the next morning, from Rosamund Culling, all but interdicted the immediate occupation of his house in town to Everard, now Earl of Romfrey. She begged him briefly not to come until after the funeral, and proposed to give him good reasons for her request at their meeting. 'I repeat, I pledge myself to satisfy you on this point,' she wrote. Her tone was that of one of your heroic women of history refusing to surrender a fortress.

Everard's wrath was ever of a complexion that could

suffer postponements without his having to fear an abatement of it. He had no business to transact in London, and he had much at the Castle, so he yielded himself up to his new sensations, which are not commonly the portion of gentlemen of his years. He anticipated that Nevil would at least come down to the funeral, but there was no appearance of him, nor a word to excuse his absence. Cecil was his only supporter. They walked together between the double ranks of bare polls of the tenantry and peasantry, resembling in a fashion old Froissart engravings the earl used to dote on in his boyhood, representing bodies of manacled citizens, whose humbled heads looked like nuts to be cracked, outside the gates of captured French towns, awaiting the disposition of their conqueror, with his banner above him and prancing knights around. That was a glory of the past. He had no successor. The thought was chilling; the solitariness of childlessness to an aged man, chief of a most ancient and martial House, and proud of his blood, gave him the statue's outlook on a desert, and made him feel that he was no more than a whirl of the dust, settling to the dust.

He listened to the parson curiously and consentingly. We are ashes. Ten centuries had come to an end in him to prove the formula correct. The chronicle of the House would state that the last Earl of Romfrey left no heir.

Cecil was a fine figure walking beside him. Measured by feet, he might be a worthy holder of great lands. But so heartily did the earl despise this nephew that he never thought of trying strength with the fellow, and hardly cared to know what his value was, beyond his immediate uses as an instrument to strike with. Beauchamp of Romfrey had been his dream, not Baskelett: and it increased his disgust of Beauchamp that Baskelett should step forward as the man. No doubt Cecil would hunt the

county famously: he would preserve game with the sleepless eye of a General of the Jesuits. These things were to be considered.

Two days after the funeral Lord Romfrey proceeded to London. He was met at the station by Rosamund, and informed that his house was not yet vacated by the French family.

'And where have you arranged for me to go, ma'am?' he asked her complacently.

She named an hotel where she had taken rooms for him.

He nodded, and was driven to the hotel, saying little on the road.

As she expected, he was heavily armed against her and Nevil.

'You 're the slave of the fellow, ma'am. You are so infatuated that you second his amours, in my house. I must wait for a clearance, it seems.'

He cast a comical glance of disapprobation on the fittings of the hotel apartment, abhorring gilt.

'They leave us the day after to-morrow,' said Rosamund, out of breath with nervousness at the commencement of the fray, and skipping over the opening ground of a bold statement of facts. 'Madame de Rouaillout has been unwell. She is not yet recovered; she has just risen. Her sister-in-law has nursed her. Her husband seems much broken in health; he is perfect on the points of courtesy.'

'That is lucky, ma'am.'

'Her brother, Nevil's comrade in the war, was there also.'

'Who came first?'

'My lord, you have only heard Captain Baskelett's version of the story. She has been my guest since the first day of her landing in England. There cannot possibly be an imputation on her.'

'Ma'am, if her husband manages to be satisfied, what on earth have I to do with it?'

'I am thinking of Nevil, my lord.'

'You 're never thinking of any one else, ma'am.'

'He sleeps here, at this hotel. He left the house to Madame de Rouaillout. I bear witness to that.'

'You two seem to have made your preparations to stand a criminal trial.'

'It is pure truth, my lord.'

'Do you take me to be anxious about the fellow's virtue?'

'She is a lady who would please you.'

'A scandal in my house does not please me.'

'The only approach to a scandal was made by Captain Baskelett.'

'A poor devil locked out of his bed on a Winter's night hullabaloos with pretty good reason. I suppose he felt the contrast.'

'My lord, this lady did me the honour to come to me on a visit. I have not previously presumed to entertain a friend. She probably formed no estimate of my exact position.'

The earl with a gesture implied Rosamund's privilege to act the hostess to friends.

'You invited her?' he said.

'That is, I had told her I hoped she would come to England.'

'She expected you to be at the house in town on her arrival?'

'It was her impulse to come.'

'She came alone?'

'She may have desired to be away from her own people for a time: there may have been domestic differences. These cases are delicate.'

'This case appears to have been so delicate that you had to lock out a fourth party.'

'It is indelicate and base of Captain Baskelett to complain and to hint. Nevil had to submit to the same; and Captain Baskelett took his revenge on the house-door and the bells. The house was visited by the police next morning.'

'Do you suspect him to have known you were inside the house that night?'

She could not say so: but hatred of Cecil urged her past the bounds of habitual reticence to put it to her lord whether he, imagining the worst, would have behaved like Cecil.

To this he did not reply, but remarked, 'I am sorry he annoyed you, ma'am.'

'It is not the annoyance to me; it is the shocking, the unmanly insolence to a lady, and a foreign lady.'

'That 's a matter between him and Nevil. I uphold him.'

'Then, my lord, I am silent.'

Silent she remained; but Lord Romfrey was also silent: and silence being a weapon of offence only when it is practised by one out of two, she had to reflect whether in speaking no further she had finished her business.

'Captain Baskelett stays at the Castle?' she asked.

'He likes his quarters there.'

'Nevil could not go down to Romfrey, my lord. He was obliged to wait, and see, and help me to entertain, her brother and her husband.'

'Why, ma'am? But I have no objection to his making the marquis a happy husband.'

'He has done what few men would have done, that she may be a self-respecting wife.'

'The parson 's in that fellow!' Lord Romfrey exclaimed. 'Now I have the story. She came to him, he declined the gift, and you were turned into the curtain for them. If he had only been off with her, he would have

done the country good service. Here he 's a failure and a nuisance; he 's a common cock-shy for the journals. I 'm tired of hearing of him; he 's a stench in our nostrils. He 's tired of the woman.'

'He loves her.'

'Ma'am, you 're hoodwinked. If he refused to have her, there 's a something he loves better. I don't believe we 've bred a downright lackadaisical donkey in our family: I know him. He 's not a fellow for abstract morality: I know him. It 's bargain against bargain with him; I 'll do him that justice. I hear he has ordered the removal of the Jersey bull from Holdesbury, and the beast is mine,' Lord Romfrey concluded in a lower key.

'Nevil has taken him.'

'Ha! pull and pull, then!'

'He contends that he is bound by a promise to give an American gentleman the refusal of the bull, and you must sign an engagement to keep the animal no longer than two years.'

'I sign no engagement. I stick to the bull.'

'Consent to see Nevil to-night, my lord.'

'When he has apologized to you, I may, ma'am.'

'Surely he did more, in requesting me to render him a service.'

'There 's not a creature living that fellow wouldn't get to serve him, if he knew the trick. We should all of us be marching on London at Shrapnel's heels. The political mania is just as incurable as hydrophobia, and he 's bitten. That 's clear.'

'Bitten perhaps: but not mad. As you have always contended, the true case is incurable, but it is very rare: and is this one?'

'It 's uncommonly like a true case, though I haven't seen him foam at the mouth, and shun water—as his mob does.'

Rosamund restrained some tears, betraying the effort to hide the moisture. 'I am no match for you, my lord. I try to plead on his behalf; I do worse than if I were dumb. This I most earnestly say: he is the Nevil Beauchamp who fought for his country, and did not abandon her cause, though he stood there—we had it from Colonel Halkett—a skeleton: and he is the Nevil who—I am poorly paying my debt to him!—defended me from the aspersions of his cousin.'

'Boys!' Lord Romfrey ejaculated.

'It is the same dispute between them as men.'

'Have you forgotten my proposal to shield you from liars and scandalmongers?'

'Could I ever forget it?' Rosamund appeared to come shining out of a cloud. 'Princeliest and truest gentleman, I thought you then, and I know you to be, my dear lord. I fancied I had lived the scandal down. I was under the delusion that I had grown to be past backbiting: and that no man could stand before me to insult and vilify me. But, for a woman in any so-called doubtful position, it seems that the coward will not be wanting to strike her. In quitting your service, I am able to affirm that only once during the whole term of it have I consciously overstepped the line of my duties: it was for Nevil: and Captain Baskelett undertook to defend your reputation, in consequence.'

'Has the rascal been questioning your conduct?' The earl frowned.

'Oh, no! not questioning: he does not question, he accuses: he never doubted: and what he went shouting as a boy, is plain matter of fact to him now. He is devoted to you. It was for your sake that he desired me to keep my name from being mixed up in a scandal he foresaw the occurrence of in your house.'

'He permitted himself to sneer at you?'

'He has the art of sneering. On this occasion he wished to be direct and personal.'

'What sort of hints were they?'

Lord Romfrey strode away from her chair that the answer might be easy to her, for she was red, and evidently suffering from shame as well as indignation.

'The hints we call distinct.' said Rosamund.

'In words?'

'In hard words.'

'Then you won't meet Cecil?'

Such a question, and the tone of indifference in which it came, surprised and revolted her so that the unreflecting reply leapt out:

'I would rather meet a devil.'

Of how tremblingly, vehemently, and hastily she had said it, she was unaware. To her lord it was an outcry of nature, astutely touched by him to put her to proof.

He continued his long leisurely strides, nodding over his feet.

Rosamund stood up. She looked a very noble figure in her broad black-furred robe. 'I have one serious confession to make, sir.'

'What 's that?' said he.

'I would avoid it, for it cannot lead to particular harm; but I have an enemy who may poison your ear in my absence. And first I resign my position. I have forfeited it.'

'Time goes forward, ma'am, and you go round. Speak to the point. Do you mean that you toss up the reins of my household?'

'I do. You trace it to Nevil immediately?'

'I do. The fellow wants to upset the country, and he begins with me.'

'You are wrong, my lord. What I have done places me at Captain Baskelett's mercy. It is too loathsome to

think of: worse than the whip; worse than your displeasure. It might never be known; but the thought that it might gives me courage. You have said that to protect a woman everything is permissible. It is your creed, my lord, and because the world, I have heard you say, is unjust and implacable to women. In some cases, I think so too. In reality I followed your instructions; I mean, your example. Cheap chivalry on my part! But it pained me not a little. I beg to urge that in my defence.'

'Well, ma'am, you have tied the knot tight enough; perhaps now you'll cut it,' said the earl.

Rosamund gasped softly. 'M. le Marquis is a gentleman who, after a life of dissipation, has been reminded by bad health that he has a young and beautiful wife.'

'He dug his pit to fall into it:—he 's jealous?'

She shook her head to indicate the immeasurable.

'Senile jealousy is anxious to be deceived. He could hardly be deceived so far as to imagine that Madame la Marquise would visit me, such as I am, as my guest. Knowingly or not, his very clever sister, a good woman, and a friend to husband and wife—a Frenchwoman of the purest type—gave me the title. She insisted on it, and I presumed to guess that she deemed it necessary for the sake of peace in that home.'

Lord Romfrey appeared merely inquisitive; his eyebrows were lifted in permanence; his eyes were mild.

She continued: 'They leave England in a few hours. They are not likely to return. I permitted him to address me with the title of countess.'

'Of Romfrey?' said the earl.

Rosamund bowed.

His mouth contracted. She did not expect thunder to issue from it, but she did fear to hear a sarcasm, or that she would have to endure a deadly silence: and she was

gathering her own lips in imitation of his, to nerve herself for some stroke to come, when he laughed in his peculiar close-mouthed manner.

'I 'm afraid you 've dished yourself.'

'You cannot forgive me, my lord?'

He indulged in more of his laughter, and abruptly summoning gravity, bade her talk to him of affairs. He himself talked of the condition of the Castle, and with a certain off-hand contempt of the ladies of the family, and Cecil's father, Sir John. 'What are they to me?' said he, and he complained of having been called Last Earl of Romfrey.

'The line ends undegenerate,' said Rosamund fervidly, though she knew not where she stood.

'Ends!' quoth the earl.

'I must see Stukely,' he added briskly, and stooped to her: 'I beg you to drive me to my Club, countess.'

'Oh! sir.'

'Once a countess, always a countess!'

'But once an impostor, my lord?'

'Not always, we'll hope.'

He enjoyed this little variation in the language of comedy; letting it drop, to say: 'Be here to-morrow early. Don't chase that family away from the house. Do as you will, but not a word of Nevil to me: he 's a bad mess in any man's porringer; it 's time for me to claim exemption of him from mine.'

She dared not let her thoughts flow, for to think was to triumph, and possibly to be deluded. They came in copious volumes when Lord Romfrey, alighting at his Club, called to the coachman: 'Drive the countess home.'

They were not thoughts of triumph absolutely. In her cooler mind she felt that it was a bad finish of a gallant battle. Few women had risen against a tattling and pelting world so stedfastly; and would it not have been

better to keep her own ground, which she had won with tears and some natural strength, and therewith her liberty, which she prized? The hateful Cecil, a reminder of whom set her cheeks burning and turned her heart to serpent, had forced her to it. So she honestly conceived, owing to the circumstance of her honestly disliking the pomps of life and not desiring to occupy any position of brilliancy. She thought assuredly of her hoard of animosity toward the scandalmongers, and of the quiet glance she would cast behind on them, and below. That thought came as a fruit, not as a reflection.

But if ever two offending young gentlemen, nephews of a long-suffering uncle, were circumvented, undermined, and struck to earth, with one blow, here was the instance. This was accomplished by Lord Romfrey's resolution to make the lady he had learnt to esteem his countess: and more, it fixed to him for life one whom he could not bear to think of losing: and still more, it might be; but what more was unwritten on his tablets.

Rosamund failed to recollect that Everard Romfrey never took a step without seeing a combination of objects to be gained by it.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE NEPHEWS OF THE EARL, AND ANOTHER EXHIBITION OF THE TWO PASSIONS IN BEAUCHAMP

It was now the season when London is as a lighted tower to her provinces, and, among other gentlemen hurried thither by attraction, Captain Baskelett arrived. Although not a personage in the House of Commons, he was a vote; and if he never committed himself to the perils of a speech, he made himself heard. His was the

part of chorus, which he performed with a fairly close imitation of the original cries of periods before parliaments were instituted, thus representing a stage in the human development besides the borough of Bevisham. He arrived in the best of moods for the emission of high-pitched vowel-sounds; otherwise in the worst of tempers. His uncle had notified an addition of his income to him at Romfrey, together with commands that he should quit the castle instantly: and there did that woman, Mistress Culling, do the honours to Nevil Beauchamp's French party. He assured Lord Palmet of his positive knowledge of the fact, incredible as the sanction of such immoral proceedings by the Earl of Romfrey must appear to that young nobleman. Additions to income are of course acceptable, but in the form of a palpable stipulation for silence, they neither awaken gratitude nor effect their purpose. Quite the contrary; they prick the moral mind to sit in judgement on the donor. It means, she fears me! Cecil confidently thought and said of the intriguing woman who managed his patron.

The town-house was open to him. Lord Romfrey was at Steynham. Cecil could not suppose that he was falling into a pit in entering it. He happened to be the favourite of the old housekeeper, who liked him for his haughtiness, which was to her thinking the sign of real English nobility, and perhaps it is the popular sign, and a tonic to the people. She raised lamentations over the shame of the locking of the door against him that awful night, declaring she had almost mustered courage to go down to him herself, in spite of Mrs. Culling's orders. The old woman lowered her voice to tell him that her official superior had permitted the French gentleman and ladies to call her countess. This she knew for a certainty, though she knew nothing of French; but the French lady who came second brought a maid who knew

English a little, and she said the very words—the countess, and said also that her party took Mrs. Culling for the Countess of Romfrey. What was more, my lord's coachman caught it up, and he called her countess, and he had a quarrel about it with the footman Kendall; and the day after a dreadful affair between them in the mews, home drives madam, and Kendall is to go up to her, and down the poor man comes, and not a word to be got out of him, but as if he had seen a ghost. 'She have such power,' Cecil's admirer concluded.

'I wager I match her,' Cecil said to himself, pulling at his wristbands and letting his lower teeth shine out. The means of matching her were not so palpable as the resolution. First he took men into his confidence. Then he touched lightly on the story to ladies, with the question, 'What ought I to do?' In consideration for the Earl of Romfrey he ought not to pass it over, he suggested. The ladies of the family urged him to go to Steynham and boldly confront the woman. He was not prepared for that. Better, it seemed to him, to blow the rumour, and make it the topic of the season, until Lord Romfrey should hear of it. Cecil had the ear of the town for a month. He was in the act of slicing the air with his right hand in his accustomed style, one evening at Lady Elsea's, to protest how vast was the dishonour done to the family by Mistress Culling, when Stukely Culbrett stopped him, saying, 'The lady you speak of is the Countess of Romfrey. I was present at the marriage.'

Cecil received the shock in the attitude of those martial figures we see wielding two wooden swords in provincial gardens to tell the disposition of the wind: abruptly abandoned by it, they stand transfixed, one sword aloft, the other at their heels. The resemblance extended to his astonished countenance. His big chest heaved. Like many another wounded giant before him, he experienced

the insufficiency of interjections to solace pain. For them, however, the rocks were handy to fling, the trees to uproot; heaven's concave resounded companionably to their bellowings. Relief of so concrete a kind is not to be obtained in crowded London assemblies.

'You are jesting?—you are a jester,' he contrived to say.

'It was a private marriage, and I was a witness,' replied Stukely.

'Lord Romfrey has made an honest woman of her, has he?'

'A peeress, you mean.'

Cecil bowed. 'Exactly. I am corrected. I mean a peeress.'

He got out of the room with as high an air as he could command, feeling as if a bar of iron had flattened his head.

Next day it was intimated to him by one of the Steynham servants that apartments were ready for him at the residence of the late earl: Lord Romfrey's house was about to be occupied by the Countess of Romfrey. Cecil had to quit, and he chose to be enamoured of that dignity of sulking so seductive to the wounded spirit of man.

Rosamund, Countess of Romfrey, had worse to endure from Beauchamp. He indeed came to the house, and he went through the formalities of congratulation, but his opinion of her step was unconcealed, that she had taken it for the title. He distressed her by reviving the case of Dr. Shrapnel, as though it were a matter of yesterday, telling her she had married a man with a stain on him; she should have exacted the Apology as a nuptial present; ay, and she would have done it if she had cared for the earl's honour or her own. So little did he understand men! so tenacious was he of his ideas! She had almost forgotten the case of Dr. Shrapnel, and to see it shooting up again in the new path of her life was really irritating.

Rosamund did not defend herself.

'I am very glad you have come, Nevil,' she said; 'your uncle holds to the ceremony. I may be of real use to you now; I wish to be.'

'You have only to prove it,' said he. 'If you can turn his mind to marriage, you can send him to Bevisham.'

'My chief thought is to serve you.'

'I know it is, I know it is,' he rejoined with some fervour. 'You have served me, and made me miserable for life, and rightly. Never mind, all 's well while the hand 's to the axe.' Beauchamp smoothed his forehead roughly, trying hard to inspire himself with the tonic draughts of sentiments cast in the form of proverbs. 'Lord Romfrey saw her, you say?'

'He did, Nevil, and admired her.'

'Well, if I suffer, let me think of *her*! For courage and nobleness I shall never find her equal. Have you changed your ideas of Frenchwomen now? Not a word, you say, not a look, to show her disdain of me whenever my name was mentioned!'

'She could scarcely feel disdain. She was guilty of a sad error.'

'Through trusting in me. Will nothing teach you where the fault lies? You women have no mercy for women. She went through the parade to Romfrey Castle and back, and she must have been perishing at heart. That, you English call acting. In history you have a respect for such acting up to the scaffold. Good-bye to her! There 's a story ended. One thing you must promise: you 're a peeress, ma'am: the story 's out, everybody has heard of it; that babbler has done his worst: if you have a becoming appreciation of your title, you will promise me honestly—no, give me your word as a woman I can esteem—that you will not run about excusing me. Whatever you hear said or suggested,

say nothing yourself. I insist on your keeping silence. Press my hand.'

'Nevil, how foolish!'

'It 's my will.'

'It is unreasonable. You give your enemies licence.'

'I know what 's in your head. Take my hand, and let me have your word for it.'

'But if persons you like very much, Nevil, should hear?'

'Promise. You are a woman not to break your word.'

'If I decline?'

'Your hand! I 'll kiss it.'

'Oh! my darling.' Rosamund flung her arms round him and strained him an instant to her bosom. 'What have I but you in the world? My comfort was the hope that I might serve you.'

'Yes! by slaying one woman as an offering to another. It would be impossible for you to speak the truth. Don't you see, it would be a lie against her, and making a figure of me that a man would rather drop to the ground than have shown of him? I was to blame, and only I. Madame de Rouaillout was as utterly deceived by me as ever a trusting woman by a brute. I look at myself and hardly believe it 's the same man. I wrote to her that I was unchanged—and I was entirely changed, another creature, anything Lord Romfrey may please to call me.'

'But, Nevil, I repeat, if Miss Halkett should hear . . . ?'

'She knows by this time.'

'At present she is ignorant of it.'

'And what is Miss Halkett to me?'

'More than you imagined in that struggle you underwent, I think, Nevil. Oh! if only to save her from Captain Baskelett! He gained your uncle's consent

when they were at the Castle, to support him in proposing for her. He is persistent. Women have been snared without loving. She is a great heiress. Reflect on his use of her wealth. You respect her, if you have no warmer feeling. Let me assure you that the husband of Cecilia, if he is of Romfrey blood, has the fairest chance of the estates. That man will employ every weapon. He will soon be here bowing to me to turn me to his purposes.'

'Cecilia can see through Baskelett,' said Beauchamp.

'Single-mindedly selfish men may be seen through and through, and still be dangerous, Nevil. The supposition is, that we know the worst of them. He carries a story to poison her mind. She could resist it, if you and she were in full confidence together. If she did not love you, she could resist it. She does, and for some strange reason beyond my capacity to fathom, you have not come to an understanding. Sanction my speaking to her, just to put her on her guard, privately: not to injure that poor lady, but to explain. Shall she not know the truth? I need say but very little. Indeed, all I can say is, that finding the marquise in London one evening, you telegraphed for me to attend on her, and I joined you. You shake your head. But surely it is due to Miss Halkett. She should be protected from what will certainly wound her deeply. Her father is afraid of you, on the score of your theories. I foresee it: he will hear the scandal: he will imagine you as bad in morals as in politics. And you have lost your friend in Lord Romfrey—though he shall not be your enemy. Colonel Halkett and Cecilia called on us at Steynham. She was looking beautiful; a trifle melancholy. The talk was of your—that—I do not like it, but you hold those opinions—the Republicanism. She had read your published letters. She spoke to me of your sincerity. Colonel Halkett of course was vexed.

It is the same with all your friends. She, however, by her tone, led me to think that she sees you as you are, more than in what you do. They are now in Wales. They will be in town after Easter. Then you must expect that her feeling for you will be tried, unless——but you will! You will let me speak to her, Nevil. My position allows me certain liberties I was previously debarred from. You have not been so very tender to your Cecilia that you can afford to give her fresh reasons for sorrowful perplexity. And why should you stand to be blackened by scandalmongers when a few words of mine will prove that instead of weak you have been strong, instead of libertine blameless? I am not using fine phrases: I would not. I would be as thoughtful of you as if you were present. And for her sake, I repeat, the truth should be told to her. I have a lock of her hair.'

'Cecilia's? Where?' said Beauchamp.

'It is at Steynham.' Rosamund primmed her lips at the success of her probing touch; but she was unaware of the chief reason for his doting on those fair locks, and how they coloured his imagination since the day of the drive into Bevisham.

'Now leave me, my dear Nevil,' she said. 'Lord Romfrey will soon be here, and it is as well for the moment that you should not meet him, if it can be avoided.'

Beauchamp left her, like a man out-argued and overcome. He had no wish to meet his uncle, whose behaviour in contracting a misalliance and casting a shadow on the family, in a manner so perfectly objectless and senseless, appeared to him to call for the reverse of compliments. Cecilia's lock of hair lying at Steynham hung in his mind. He saw the smooth flat curl lying secret like a smile.

The graceful head it had fallen from was dimmer in his mental eye. He went so far in this charmed meditation as to feel envy of the possessor of the severed lock:

passingly he wondered, with the wonder of reproach, that the possessor should deem it enough to possess the lock, and resign it to a drawer or a desk. And as when life rolls back on us after the long ebb of illness, little whispers and diminutive images of the old joys and prizes of life arrest and fill our hearts; or as, to men who have been beaten down by storms, the opening of a daisy is dearer than the blazing orient which bids it open; so the visionary lock of Cecilia's hair became Cecilia's self to Beauchamp, yielding him as much of her as he could bear to think of, for his heart was shattered.

Why had she given it to his warmest friend? For the asking, probably.

This question was the first ripple of the breeze from other emotions beginning to flow fast.

He walked out of London, to be alone, and to think: and from the palings of a road on a South-western run of high land, he gazed at the great city—a place conquerable yet, with the proper appliances for subjugating it: the starting of his daily newspaper, The Dawn, say, as a commencement. It began to seem a possible enterprise. It soon seemed a proximate one. If Cecilia!—— He left the exclamation a blank, but not an empty dash in the brain; rather like the shroud of night on a vast and gloriously imagined land.

Nay, the prospect was partly visible, as the unknown country becomes by degrees to the traveller's optics on the dark hill-tops. It is much, of course, to be domestically well-mated: but to be fortified and armed by one's wife with a weapon to fight the world, is rare good fortune; a rapturous and an infinite satisfaction. He could now support of his own resources a weekly paper. A paper published weekly, however, is a poor thing, out of the tide, behind the date, mainly a literary periodical, no foremost combatant in politics, no champion in the arena;

hardly better than a commentator on the events of the six past days; an echo, not a voice. It sits on a Saturday bench and pretends to sum up. Who listens? The verdict knocks dust out of a cushion. It has no steady continuous pressure of influence. It is the organ of sleepers. Of all the bigger instruments of money, it is the feeblest, Beauchamp thought. His constant faith in the good effects of utterance naturally inclined him to value six occasions per week above one; and in the fight he was for waging, it was necessary that he should enter the ring and hit blow for blow sans intermission. A statement that he could call false must be challenged hot the next morning. The covert Toryism, the fits of flunkeyism, the cowardice, of the relapsing middle-class, which is now England before mankind, because it fills the sails of the Press, must be exposed. It supports the Press in its own interests, affecting to speak for the people. It belies the people. And this Press, declaring itself independent, can hardly walk for fear of treading on an interest here, an interest there. It cannot have a conscience. It is a bad guide, a false guardian; its abject claim to be our national and popular interpreter—even that is hollow and a mockery! It is powerful only while subservient. An engine of money, appealing to the sensitiveness of money, it has no connection with the mind of the nation. And that it is not of, but apart from, the people, may be seen when great crises come. Can it stop a war? The people would, and with thunder, had they the medium. But in strong gales the power of the Press collapses; it wheezes like a pricked pigskin of a piper. At its best Beauchamp regarded our lordly Press as a curiously diapered curtain and delusive mask, behind which the country struggles vainly to show an honest feature; and as a trumpet that deafened and terrorized the people; a mere engine of leaguers banded to keep a smooth face

upon affairs, quite soullessly: he meanwhile having to be dumb.

But a Journal that should be actually independent of circulation and advertisements: a popular journal in the true sense, very lungs to the people, for them to breathe freely through at last, and be heard out of it, with well-paid men of mark to head and aid them;—the establishment of such a Journal seemed to him brave work of a life, though one should die early. The money launching it would be coin washed pure of its iniquity of selfish reproduction, by service to mankind. This DAWN of his conception stood over him like a rosier Aurora for the country. He beheld it in imagination as a new light rising above hugeous London. You turn the sheets of THE DAWN, and it is the manhood of the land addressing you, no longer that alternately puling and insolent cry of the coffers. The health, wealth, comfort, contentment of the greater number are there to be striven for, in contempt of compromise and 'unseasonable times.'

Beauchamp's illuminated dream of the power of his DAWN to vitalize old England, liberated him singularly from his wearing regrets and heart-sickness.

Surely Cecilia, who judged him sincere, might be bent to join hands with him for so good a work! She would bring riches to her husband: sufficient. He required the ablest men of the country to write for him, and it was just that they should be largely paid. They at least in their present public apathy would demand it. To fight the brewers, distillers, publicans, the shopkeepers, the parsons, the landlords, the law limpets, and also the indifferents, the logs, the cravens and the fools, high talent was needed, and an ardour stimulated by rates of pay outdoing the offers of the lucre-journals. A large annual outlay would therefore be needed; possibly for as long as a quarter of a century. Cecilia and her husband would have to

live modestly. But her inheritance would be immense. Colonel Halkett had never spent a tenth of his income. In time he might be taught to perceive in THE DAWN the one greatly beneficent enterprise of his day. He might: through his daughter's eyes, and the growing success of the Journal. Benevolent and gallant old man, patriotic as he was, and kind at heart, he might learn to see in THE DAWN a broader channel of philanthropy and chivalry than any we have yet had a notion of in England!—a school of popular education into the bargain.

Beauchamp reverted to the shining curl. It could not have been clearer to vision if it had lain under his eyes.

Ay, that first wild life of his was dead. He had slain it. Now for the second and sober life! Who can say? The Countess of Romfrey suggested it:—Cecilia may have prompted him in his unknown heart to the sacrifice of a lawless love, though he took it for simply barren iron duty. Brooding on her, he began to fancy the victory over himself less and less a lame one: for it waxed less and less difficult in his contemplation of it. He was looking forward instead of back.

Who cut off the lock? Probably Cecilia herself; and thinking at the moment that he would see it, perhaps beg for it. The lustrous little ring of hair wound round his heart; smiled both on its emotions and its aims; bound them in one.

But proportionately as he grew tender to Cecilia, his consideration for Renée increased; that became a law to him: pity nourished it, and glimpses of self-contempt, and something like worship of her high-heartedness.

He wrote to the countess, forbidding her sharply and absolutely to attempt a vindication of him by explanations to any persons whomsoever; and stating that he would have no falsehoods told, he desired her to keep to the original tale of the visit of the French family to her as

guests of the Countess of Romfrey. Contradictory indeed. Rosamund shook her head over him. For a wilful character that is guilty of issuing contradictory commands to friends who would be friends in spite of him, appears to be expressly angling for the cynical spirit, so surely does it rise and snap at such provocation. He was even more emphatic when they next met. He would not listen to a remonstrance; and though, of course, her love of him granted him the liberty to speak to her in what tone he pleased, there were sensations proper to her new rank which his intemperateness wounded and tempted to revolt when he vexed her with unreason. She had a glimpse of the face he might wear to his enemies.

He was quite as resolute, too, about that slight matter of the Jersey bull. He had the bull in Bevisham, and would not give him up without the sign manual of Lord Romfrey to an agreement to resign him over to the American Quaker gentleman, after a certain term. Moreover, not once had he, by exclamation or innuendo, during the period of his recent grief for the loss of his first love, complained of his uncle Everard's refusal in the old days to aid him in suing for Renée. Rosamund had expected that he would. She thought it unloverlike in him not to stir the past, and to bow to intolerable facts. This idea of him, coming in conjunction with his present behaviour, convinced her that there existed a contradiction in his nature: whence it ensued that she lost her warmth as an advocate designing to intercede for him with Cecilia; and warmth being gone, the power of the scandal seemed to her unassailable. How she could ever have presumed to combat it, was an astonishment to her. Cecilia might be indulgent, she might have faith in Nevil. Little else could be hoped for.

The occupations, duties, and ceremonies of her new position contributed to the lassitude into which Rosamund

sank. And she soon had a communication to make to her lord, the nature of which was more startling to herself, even tragic. The bondwoman is a free woman compared with the wife.

Lord Romfrey's friends noticed a glow of hearty health in the splendid old man, and a prouder animation of eye and stature; and it was agreed that matrimony suited him well. Luckily for Cecil he did not sulk very long. A spectator of the earl's first introduction to the House of Peers, he called on his uncle the following day, and Rosamund accepted his homage in her husband's presence. He vowed that my lord was the noblest figure in the whole assembly; that it had been to him the most moving sight he had ever witnessed; that Nevil should have been there to see it and experience what he had felt; it would have done old Nevil incalculable good! and as far as his grief at the idea and some reticence would let him venture, he sighed to think of the last Earl of Romfrey having been seen by him taking the seat of his fathers.

Lord Romfrey shouted 'Ha!' like a checked peal of laughter, and glanced at his wife.

CHAPTER XLV

A LITTLE PLOT AGAINST CECILIA

Some days before Easter week Seymour Austin went to Mount Laurels for rest, at an express invitation from Colonel Halkett. The working barrister, who is also a working member of Parliament, is occasionally reminded that this mortal machine cannot adapt itself in perpetuity to the long hours of labour by night in the House of Commons as well as by day in the Courts, which would

seem to have been arranged by a compliant country for the purpose of aiding his particular, and most honourable, ambition to climb, while continuing to fill his purse. Mr. Austin broke down early in the year. He attributed it to a cold. Other representative gentlemen were on their backs, of whom he could admit that the protracted night-work had done them harm, with the reservation that their constitutions were originally unsound. But the House cannot get on without lawyers, and lawyers must practise their profession, and if they manage both to practise all day and sit half the night, others should be able to do the simple late sitting; and we English are an energetic people, we must toil or be beaten: and besides, 'night brings counsel,' men are cooler and wiser by night. Any amount of work can be performed by careful feeders: it is the stomach that kills the Englishman. Brains are never the worse for activity; they subsist on it.

These arguments and citations, good and absurd, of a man more at home in his harness than out of it, were addressed to the colonel to stop his remonstrances and idle talk about burning the candle at both ends. To that illustration Mr. Austin replied that he did not burn it in the middle.

'But you don't want money, Austin.'

'No; but since I 've had the habit of making it I have taken to like it.'

'But you 're not ambitious.'

'Very little; but I should be sorry to be out of the tide-way.'

'I call it a system of slaughter,' said the colonel; and Mr. Austin said, 'The world goes in that way—love and slaughter.'

'Not suicide though,' Colonel Halkett muttered.

'No, that 's only incidental.'

The casual word 'love' led Colonel Halkett to speak to

Cecilia of an old love-affair of Seymour Austin's, in discussing the state of his health with her. The lady was the daughter of a famous admiral, handsome, and latterly of light fame. Mr. Austin had nothing to regret in her having married a man richer than himself.

'I wish he had married a good woman,' said the colonel.

'He looks unwell, papa.'

'He thinks you 're looking unwell, my dear.'

'He thinks that of me?'

Cecilia prepared a radiant face for Mr. Austin.

She forgot to keep it kindled, and he suspected her to be a victim of one of the forms of youthful melancholy, and laid stress on the benefit to health of a change of scene.

'We have just returned from Wales,' she said.

He remarked that it was hardly a change to be within shot of our newspapers.

The colour left her cheeks. She fancied her father had betrayed her to the last man who should know her secret. Beauchamp and the newspapers were rolled together in her mind by the fever of apprehension wasting her ever since his declaration of Republicanism, and defence of it, and an allusion to one must imply the other, she feared:—feared, but far from quailingly. She had come to think that she could read the man she loved, and detect a reasonableness in his extravagance. Her father had discovered the impolicy of attacking Beauchamp in her hearing. The fever by which Cecilia was possessed on her lover's behalf, often overcame discretion, set her judgement in a whirl, was like a delirium. How it had happened she knew not. She knew only her wretched state; a frenzy seized her whenever his name was uttered, to excuse, account for, all but glorify him publicly. And the immodesty of her conduct was perceptible to her while she thus made her heart bare. She

exposed herself once of late at Itchincope, and had tried to school her tongue before she went there. She felt that she should inevitably be seen through by Seymour Austin if he took the world's view of Beauchamp, and this to her was like a descent on the rapids to an end one shuts eyes from.

He noticed her perturbation, and spoke of it to her father.

'Yes, I 'm very miserable about her,' the colonel confessed. 'Girls don't see . . . they can't guess . . . they have no idea of the right kind of man for them. A man like Blackburn Tuckham, now, a man a father could leave his girl to, with confidence! He works for me like a slave; I can't guess why. He doesn't look as if he were attracted. There 's a man! but, no; harum-scarum fellows take their fancy.'

'Is *she* that kind of young lady?' said Mr. Austin.

'No one would have thought so. She pretends to have opinions upon politics now. It 's of no use to talk of it!'

But Beauchamp was fully indicated.

Mr. Austin proposed to Cecilia that they should spend Easter week in Rome.

Her face lighted and clouded.

'I should like it,' she said, negatively.

'What 's the objection?'

'None, except that Mount Laurels in Spring has grown dear to me; and we have engagements in London. I am not quick, I suppose, at new projects. I have ordered the yacht to be fitted out for a cruise in the Mediterranean early in the Summer. There is an objection, I am sure—yes; papa has invited Mr. Tuckham here for Easter.'

'We could carry him with us.'

'Yes, but I should wish to be entirely under your tutelage in Rome.'

'We would pair: your father and he; you and I.'

'We might do that. But Mr. Tuckham is like you, devoted to work; and, unlike you, careless of Antiquities and Art.'

'He is a hard and serious worker, and therefore the best of companions for a holiday. At present he is working for the colonel, who would easily persuade him to give over, and come with us.'

'He certainly does love papa,' said Cecilia.

Mr. Austin dwelt on that subject.

Cecilia perceived that she had praised Mr. Tuckham for his devotedness to her father without recognizing the beauty of nature in the young man who could voluntarily take service under the elder he esteemed, in simple admiration of him. Mr. Austin scarcely said so much, or expected her to see the half of it, but she wished to be extremely grateful, and could only see at all by kindling altogether.

'He does himself injustice in his manner,' said Cecilia.

'That has become somewhat tempered,' Mr. Austin assured her, and he acknowledged what it had been with a smile that she reciprocated.

A rough man of rare quality civilizing under various influences, and half ludicrous, a little irritating, wholly estimable, has frequently won the benign approbation of the sex. In addition, this rough man over whom she smiled was one of the few that never worried her concerning her hand. There was not a whisper of it in him. He simply loved her father.

Cecilia welcomed him to Mount Laurels with grateful gladness. The colonel had hastened Mr. Tuckham's visit in view of the expedition to Rome, and they discoursed of it at the luncheon table. Mr. Tuckham let fall that he had just seen Beauchamp.

'Did he thank you for his inheritance?' Colonel Halkett inquired.

'Not he!' Tuckham replied jovially.

Cecilia's eyes, quick to flash, were dropped.

The colonel said: 'I suppose you told him nothing of what you had done for him?' and said Tuckham: 'Oh no: what anybody else would have done'; and proceeded to recount that he had called at Dr. Shrapnel's on the chance of an interview with his friend Lydiard, who used generally to be hanging about the cottage. 'But now he 's free: his lunatic wife is dead, and I 'm happy to think I was mistaken as to Miss Denham. Men practising literature should marry women with money. The poor girl changed colour when I informed her he had been released for upwards of three months. The old Radical's not the thing in health. He 's anxious about leaving her alone in the world; he said so to me. Beauchamp 's for rigging out a yacht to give him a sail. It seems that salt water did him some good last year. They 're both of them rather the worse for a row at one of their meetings in the North in support of that public nuisance, the democrat and atheist Roughleigh. The Radical doctor lost a hat, and Beauchamp almost lost an eye. He would have been a Nelson of politics, if he had been a monops, with an excuse for not seeing. It 's a trifle to them; part of their education. They call themselves students. Rome will be capital, Miss Halkett. You 're an Italian scholar, and I beg to be accepted as a pupil.'

'I fear we have postponed the expedition too long,' said Cecilia. She could have sunk with languor.

'Too long?' cried Colonel Halkett, mystified.

'Until too late, I mean, papa. Do you not think, Mr. Austin, that a fortnight in Rome is too short a time?'

'Not if we make it a month, my dear Cecilia.'

'Is not our salt air better for you? The yacht shall be fitted out.'

'I 'm a poor sailor!'

'Besides, a hasty excursion to Italy brings one's anticipated regrets at the farewell too close to the pleasure of beholding it, for the enjoyment of that luxury of delight which I associate with the name of Italy.'

'Why, my dear child,' said her father, 'you were all for going, the other day.'

'I do not remember it,' said she. 'One plans agreeable schemes. At least we need not hurry from home so very soon after our return. We have been travelling incessantly. The cottage in Wales is not home. It is hardly fair to Mount Laurels to quit it without observing the changes of the season in our flowers and birds here. And we have visitors coming. Of course, papa, I would not chain you to England. If I am not well enough to accompany you, I can go to Louise for a few weeks.'

Was ever transparency so threadbare? Cecilia shrank from herself in contemplating it when she was alone; and Colonel Halkett put the question to Mr. Austin, saying to him privately, with no further reserve: 'It 's that fellow Beauchamp in the neighbourhood; I 'm not so blind. He 'll be knocking at my door, and I can't lock him out. Austin, would you guess it was my girl speaking? I never in my life had such an example of intoxication before me. I 'm perfectly miserable at the sight. You know her; she was the proudest girl living. Her ideas were orderly and sound; she *had* a good intellect. Now she more than half defends him—a naval officer! good Lord!—for getting up in a public room to announce that he 's a Republican, and writing heaps of mad letters to justify himself. He 's ruined in his profession: hopeless! He can never get a ship: his career 's cut short, he 's a rudderless boat. A gentleman drifting to Bedlam, his uncle calls him. I call his treatment of Grancey Lespel anything but gentlemanly. This is the sort of

fellow my girl worships! What can I do? I can't interdict the house to him: it would only make matters worse. Thank God, the fellow hangs fire somehow, and doesn't come to me. I expect it every day, either in a letter or the man in person. And I declare to heaven I 'd rather be threading a Khyber Pass with my poor old friend who fell to a shot there.'

'She certainly has another voice,' Mr. Austin assented gravely.

He did not look on Beauchamp as the best of possible husbands for Cecilia.

'Let her see that you 're anxious, Austin,' said the colonel. 'I 'm her old opponent in this affair. She loves me, but she 's accustomed to think me prejudiced: you she won't. You may have a good effect.'

'Not by speaking.'

'No, no; no assault: not a word, and not a word against him. Lay the wind to catch a gossamer. I 've had my experience of blowing cold, and trying to run her down. He 's at Shrapnel's. He 'll be up here to-day, and I have an engagement in the town. Don't quit her side. Let her fancy you are interested in some discussion—Radicalism, if you like.'

Mr. Austin readily undertook to mount guard over her while her father rode into Bevisham on business.

The enemy appeared.

Cecilia saw him, and could not step to meet him for trouble of heart. It was bliss to know that he lived and was near.

A transient coldness following the fit of ecstasy enabled her to swim through the terrible first minutes face to face with him.

He folded her round like a mist; but it grew a problem to understand why Mr. Austin should be perpetually at hand, in the garden, in the woods, in the drawing-room,

wheresoever she wakened up from one of her trances to see things as they were.

Yet Beauchamp, with a daring and cunning at which her soul exulted, and her feminine nature trembled, as at the divinely terrible, had managed to convey to her no less than if they had been alone together.

His parting words were: 'I must have five minutes with your father to-morrow.'

How had she behaved? What could be Seymour Austin's idea of her?

She saw the blind thing that she was, the senseless thing, the shameless; and vulture-like in her scorn of herself, she alighted on that disgraced Cecilia and picked her to pieces hungrily. It was clear: Beauchamp had meant nothing beyond friendly civility: it was only her abject greediness pecking at crumbs. No! he loved her. Could a woman's heart be mistaken? She melted and wept, thanking him: she offered him her remnant of pride, pitiful to behold.

And still she asked herself betweenwhiles whether it could be true of an English lady of our day, that she, the fairest stature under sun, was ever knowingly twisted to this convulsion. She seemed to look forth from a barred window on flower, and field, and hill. Quietness existed as a vision. Was it impossible to embrace it? How pass into it? By surrendering herself to the flames, like a soul unto death! For why, if they were overpowering, attempt to resist them? It flattered her to imagine that she had been resisting them in their present burning might ever since her lover stepped on the Esperanza's deck at the mouth of Otley River. How foolish, seeing that they are fatal! A thrill of satisfaction swept her in reflecting that her ability to reason was thus active. And she was instantly rewarded for surrendering; pain fled, to prove

her reasoning good; the flames devoured her gently: they cared not to torture so long as they had her to themselves.

At night, candle in hand, on the corridor, her father told her he had come across Grancey Lespel in Bevisham, and heard what he had not quite relished of the Countess of Romfrey. The glittering of Cecilia's eyes frightened him. Taking her for the moment to know almost as much as he, the colonel doubted the weight his communication would have on her; he talked obscurely of a scandalous affair at Lord Romfrey's house in town, and Beauchamp and that Frenchwoman. 'But,' said he, 'Mrs. Grancey will be here to-morrow.'

'So will Nevil, papa,' said Cecilia.

'Ah! he 's coming, yes; well!' the colonel puffed. 'Well, I shall see him, of course, but I . . . I can only say that if his oath 's worth having, I . . . and I think you too, my dear, if you . . . but it 's no use anticipating. I shall stand out for your honour and happiness. There, your cheeks are flushed. Go and sleep.'

Some idle tale! Cecilia murmured to herself a dozen times, undisturbed by the recurrence of it. Nevil was coming to speak to her father to-morrow! Adieu to doubt and division! Happy to-morrow! and dear Mount Laurels! The primroses were still fair in the woods: and soon the cowslips would come, and the nightingale; she lay lapt in images of everything innocently pleasing to Nevil. Soon the Esperanza would be spreading wings. She revelled in a picture of the yacht on a tumbling Mediterranean Sea, meditating on the two specks near the tiller,—who were blissful human creatures, blest by heaven and in themselves—with luxurious Olympian benevolence.

For all that, she awoke, starting up in the first cold circle of twilight, her heart in violent action. She had

dreamed that the vessel was wrecked. 'I did not think myself so cowardly,' she said aloud, pressing her side: and then, with the dream in her eyes, she gasped: 'It would be together!'

Strangely chilled, she tried to recover some fallen load. The birds of the dawn twittered, chirped, dived aslant her window, fluttered back. Instead of a fallen load, she fancied presently that it was an expectation she was desiring to realize: but what? What could be expected at that hour? She quitted her bed, and paced up and down the room beneath a gold-starred ceiling. Her expectation, she resolved to think, was of a splendid day of the young Spring at Mount Laurels—a day to praise to Nevil.

She raised her window-blind at a window letting in sweet air, to gather indications of promising weather. Her lover stood on the grass-plot among the flower-beds below, looking up, as though it had been his expectation to see her which had drawn her to gaze out with an idea of some expectation of her own. So visionary was his figure in the grey solitariness of the moveless morning that she stared at the apparition, scarce putting faith in him as man, until he kissed his hand to her, and had softly called her name.

Impulsively she waved a hand from her lips.

Now there was no retreat for either of them!

She awoke to this conviction after a flight of blushes that burnt her thoughts to ashes as they sprang. Thoughts born blushing, all of the crimson colour, a rose-garden, succeeded, and corresponding with their speed her feet paced the room, both slender hands crossed at her throat under an uplifted chin, and the curves of her dark eyelashes dropped as in a swoon.

'He loves me!' The attestation of it had been visible. 'No one but me!' Was that so evident?

Her father picked up silly stories of him—a man who made enemies recklessly!

Cecilia was petrified by a gentle tapping at her door. Her father called to her, and she threw on her dressing-gown, and opened the door.

The colonel was in his riding-suit.

'I haven't slept a wink, and I find it 's the same with you,' he said, paining her with his distressed kind eyes. 'I ought not to have hinted anything last night without proofs. Austin 's as unhappy as I am.'

'At what, my dear papa, at what?' cried Cecilia.

'I ride over to Steynham this morning, and I shall bring you proofs, my poor child, proofs. That foreign tangle of his . . .'

'You speak of Nevil, papa?'

'It 's a common scandal over London. That French-woman was found at Lord Romfrey's house; Lady Romfrey cloaked it. I believe the woman would swear black 's white to make Nevil Beauchamp appear an angel; and he 's a desperately cunning hand with women. You doubt that.'

She had shuddered slightly.

'You won't doubt if I bring you proofs. Till I come back from Steynham, I ask you not to see him alone: not to go out to him.'

The colonel glanced at her windows.

Cecilia submitted to the request, out of breath, consenting to feel like a tutored girl, that she might conceal her guilty knowledge of what was to be seen through the windows.

'Now I 'm off,' said he, and kissed her.

'If you would accept Nevil's word!' she murmured.

'Not where women are concerned!'

He left her with this remark, which found no jealous response in her heart, yet ranged over certain dispersed

inflammable grains, like a match applied to damp powder; again and again running in little leaps of harmless fire, keeping her alive to its existence, and surprising her that it should not have been extinguished.

Beauchamp presented himself rather late in the afternoon, when Mr. Austin and Blackburn Tuckham were sipping tea in Cecilia's boudoir with that lady, and a cousin of her sex, by whom she was led to notice a faint discoloration over one of his eyes, that was, considering whence it came, repulsive to compassion. A blow at a Radical meeting! He spoke of Dr. Shrapnel to Tuckham, and assuredly could not complain that the latter was unsympathetic in regard to the old man's health, though when he said, 'Poor old man! he fears he will die!' Tuckham rejoined: 'He had better make his peace.'

'He fears he will die, because of his leaving Miss Denham unprotected,' said Beauchamp.

'Well, she 's a good-looking girl: he 'll be able to leave her something, and he might easily get her married, I should think,' said Tuckham.

'He 's not satisfied with handing her to any kind of man.'

'If the choice is to be among Radicals and infidels, I don't wonder. He has come to one of the tests.'

Cecilia heard Beauchamp speaking of a newspaper. A great Radical Journal, unmatched in sincerity, superior in ability, soon to be equal in power, to the leader and exemplar of the lucre-Press, would some day see the light.

'You 'll want money for that,' said Tuckham.

'I know,' said Beauchamp.

'Are you prepared to stand forty or fifty thousand a year?'

'It need not be half so much.'

'Counting the libels, I rate the outlay rather low.'

'Yes, lawyers, judges, and juries of tradesmen, dealing justice to a Radical print!'

Tuckham brushed his hand over his mouth and ahemed. 'It 's to be a penny journal?'

'Yes, a penny. I 'd make it a farthing——'

'Pay to have it read?'

'Willingly.'

Tuckham did some mental arithmetic, quaintly, with rapidly blinking eyelids and open mouth. 'You may count it at the cost of two paying mines,' he said firmly. 'That is, if it 's to be a consistently Radical Journal, at law with everybody all round the year. And by the time it has won a reputation, it will be undermined by a radicaller Radical Journal. That 's how we 've lowered the country to this level. That 's an Inferno of Circles, down to the ultimate mire. And what on earth are you contending for?'

'Freedom of thought, for one thing.'

'We have quite enough free-thinking.'

'There 's not enough if there 's not perfect freedom.'

'Dangerous!' quoth Mr. Austin.

'But it 's that danger which makes men, sir; and it 's fear of the danger that makes our modern Englishman.'

'Oh! Oh!' cried Tuckham in the voice of a Parliamentary Opposition. 'Well, you start your paper, we 'll assume it: what class of men will you get to write?'

'I shall get good men for the hire.'

'You won't get the best men; you may catch a clever youngster or two, and an old rogue of talent; you won't get men of weight. They 're prejudiced, I dare say. The Journals which are commercial speculations give us a guarantee that they mean to be respectable; they must, if they wouldn't collapse. That 's why the best men consent to write for them.'

'Money will do it,' said Beauchamp.

Mr. Austin disagreed with that observation.

'Some patriotic spirit, I may hope, sir.'

Mr. Austin shook his head. 'We put different constructions upon patriotism.'

'Besides—fiddle! nonsense!' exclaimed Tuckham in the mildest interjections he could summon for a vent in society to his offended common sense; 'the better your men the worse your mark. You 're not dealing with an intelligent people.'

'There 's the old charge against the people.'

'But they 're not. You can madden, you can't elevate them by writing and writing. Defend us from the uneducated English! The common English are doltish; except in the North, where you won't do much with them. Compare them with the Yankees for shrewdness, the Spaniards for sobriety, the French for ingenuity, the Germans for enlightenment, the Italians in the Arts; yes, the Russians for good-humour and obedience—where are they? They 're only worth something when they 're led. They fight well; there 's good stuff in them.'

'I 've heard all that before,' returned Beauchamp, unruffled. 'You don't know them. I mean to educate them by giving them an interest in their country. At present they have next to none. Our governing class is decidedly unintelligent, in my opinion brutish, for it 's indifferent. My paper shall render your traders justice for what they do, and justice for what they don't do.'

'My traders, as you call them, are the soundest foundation for a civilized state that the world has yet seen.'

'What is your paper to be called?' said Cecilia.

'The Dawn,' Beauchamp answered.

She blushed fiery red, and turned the leaves of a portfolio of drawings.

'The Dawn!' ejaculated Tuckham. 'The grey-eyed,

or the red? Extraordinary name for a paper, upon my word!'

'A paper that doesn't devote half its columns to the vices of the rich—to money-getting, spending and betting—will be an extraordinary paper.'

'I have it before me now!—two doses of flattery to one of the whip. No, no; you haven't hit the disease. We want union, not division. Turn your mind to being a moralist, instead of a politician.'

'The distinction should n't exist!'

'Only it does!'

Mrs. Grancey Lespel's entrance diverted their dialogue from a theme wearisome to Cecilia, for Beauchamp shone but darkly in it, and Mr. Austin did not join in it. Mrs. Grancey touched Beauchamp's fingers. 'Still political?' she said. 'You have been seen about London with a French officer in uniform.'

'It was M. le comte de Croisnel, a very old friend and comrade of mine,' Beauchamp replied.

'Why do those Frenchmen everlastingly wear their uniforms?—tell me! Don't you think it detestable style?'

'He came over in a hurry.'

'Now, don't be huffed. I know you, for defending your friends, Captain Beauchamp! Did he not come over with ladies?'

'With relatives, yes.'

'Relatives of course. But when British officers travel with ladies, relatives or other, they prefer the simplicity of mufti, and so do I, as a question of taste, I must say.'

'It was quite by misadventure that M. de Croisnel chanced to come in his uniform.'

'Ah! I know you, for defending your friends, Captain Beauchamp. He was in too great a hurry to change his uniform before he started, or en route?'

'So it happened.'

Mrs. Grancey let a lingering eye dwell maliciously on Beauchamp, who said, to shift the burden of it: 'The French are not so jealous of military uniforms as we are. M. de Croisnel lost his portmanteau.'

'Ah! lost it! Then of course he is excuseable, except to the naked eye. Dear me! you have had a bruise on yours. Was Monsieur votre ami in the Italian campaign?'

'No, poor fellow, he was not. He is not an Imperialist; he had to remain in garrison.'

'He wore a multitude of medals, I have been told. A cup of tea, Cecilia. And how long did he stay in England with his relatives?'

'Two days.'

'Only two days! A very short visit indeed—singularly short. Somebody informed me of their having been seen at Romfrey Castle, which cannot have been true.'

She turned her eyes from Beauchamp silent to Cecilia's hand on the teapot. 'Half a cup,' she said mildly, to spare the poor hand its betrayal of nervousness, and relapsed from her air of mistress of the situation to chatter to Mr. Austin.

Beauchamp continued silent. He took up a book, and presently a pencil from his pocket, then talked of the book to Cecilia's cousin; and leaving a paper-cutter between the leaves, he looked at Cecilia and laid the book down.

She proceeded to conduct Mrs. Grancey Lespel to her room.

'I do admire Captain Beauchamp's cleverness; he is as good as a French romance!' Mrs. Grancey exclaimed on the stairs. 'He fibs charmingly. I could not help drawing him out. Two days! Why, my dear, his French party were a fortnight in the country. It was

the marquise, you know—the old affair; and one may say he 's a constant man.'

'I have not heard Captain Beauchamp's cleverness much praised,' said Cecilia. 'This is your room, Mrs. Grancey.'

'Stay with me a moment. It is the room I like. Are we to have him at dinner?'

Cecilia did not suppose that Captain Beauchamp would remain to dine. Feeling herself in the clutches of a gossip, she would fain have gone.

'I am just one bit glad of it, though I can't dislike him personally,' said Mrs. Grancey, detaining her and beginning to whisper. 'It was really too bad. There was a French *party* at the end, but there was only *one* at the commencement. The brother was got over for a curtain, before the husband arrived in pursuit. They say the trick Captain Beauchamp played his cousin Cecil, to get him out of the house when he had made a discovery, was monstrous—fiendishly cunning. However, Lady Romfrey, as that woman appears to be at last, covered it all. You know she has one of those passions for Captain Beauchamp which completely blind women to right and wrong. He is her saint, let him sin ever so! The story 's in everybody's mouth. By the way, Palmet saw her. He describes her pale as marble, with dark long eyes, the most innocent look in the world, and a walk, the absurd fellow says, like a statue set gliding. No doubt Frenchwomen do walk well. He says her eyes are terrible traitors; I need not quote Palmet. The sort of eyes that would look fondly on a stone, you know. What her reputation is in France I have only indistinctly heard. She has one in England by this time, I can assure you. She found her match in Captain Beauchamp for boldness. Where any other couple would have seen danger, *they* saw safety; and they contrived to accomplish it, according

to those horrid talebearers. You have plenty of time to dress, my dear; I have an immense deal to talk about. There are half-a-dozen scandals in London already, and you ought to know them, or you will be behind the tittle-tattle when you go to town; and I remember, as a girl, I knew nothing so excruciating as to hear blanks, dashes, initials, and half words, without the key. Nothing makes a girl look so silly and unpalatable. Naturally, the reason why Captain Beauchamp is more talked about than the rest is the politics. Your grand reformer should be careful. Doubly heterodox will not do! It makes him interesting to women, if you like, but he won't soon hear the last of it, if he is for a public career. Grancey literally crowed at the story. And the wonderful part of it is, that Captain Beauchamp refused to be present at the earl's first ceremonial dinner in honour of his countess. Now, that, we all think, was particularly ungrateful: now, was it not?'

'If the countess—if ingratitude had anything to do with it,' said Cecilia.

She escaped to her room and dressed impatiently.

Her boudoir was empty: Beauchamp had departed. She recollected his look at her, and turned over the leaves of the book he had been hastily scanning, and had condescended to approve of. On the two pages where the paper-cutter was fixed she perceived small pencil dots under certain words. Read consecutively, with a participle termination struck out to convey his meaning, they formed the pathetically ungrammatical line:—

'Hear: none: but: accused: false.'

Treble dots were under the word 'to-morrow.' He had scored the margin of the sentences containing his dotted words, as if in admiration of their peculiar wisdom.

She thought it piteous that he should be reduced to such

means of communication. The next instant Cecilia was shrinking from the adept intriguer—French-taught!

In the course of the evening her cousin remarked: 'Captain Beauchamp must see merit in things undiscoverable by my poor faculties. I will show you a book he has marked.'

'Did you see it? I was curious to examine it,' interposed Cecilia; 'and I am as much at a loss as you to understand what could have attracted him. One sentence . . .'

'About the sheikh in the stables, where he accused the pretended physician? Yes, what was there in that?'

'Where is the book?' said Mrs. Grancey.

'Not here, I think.' Cecilia glanced at the drawing-room book-table, and then at Mr. Austin, the victim of an unhappy love in his youth, and unhappy about her, as her father had said. Seymour Austin was not one to spread the contagion of intrigue! She felt herself caught by it, even melting to feel enamoured of herself in consequence, though not loving Beauchamp the more.

'This newspaper, if it 's not merely an airy project, will be ruination,' said Tuckham. 'The fact is, Beauchamp has no *bend* in him. He can't meet a man without trying a wrestle, and as long as he keeps his stiffness, he believes he has won. I 've heard an oculist say that the eye that doesn't blink ends in blindness, and he who won't bend breaks. It 's a pity, for he 's a fine fellow. A Radical daily Journal of Shrapnel's colour, to educate the people by giving them an interest in the country! Goodness, what a delusion! and what a waste of money! He 'll not be able to carry it on a couple of years. And there goes his eighty thousand!'

Cecilia's heart beat fast. She had no defined cause for its excitement.

Colonel Halkett returned to Mount Laurels close upon

midnight, very tired, coughing and complaining of the bitter blowing East. His guests shook hands with him, and went to bed.

'I think I 'll follow their example,' he said to Cecilia, after drinking a tumbler of mulled wine.

'Have you nothing to tell me, dear papa?' said she, caressing him timidly.

'A confirmation of the whole story from Lord Romfrey in person—that 's all. He says Beauchamp 's mad. I begin to believe it. You must use your judgement. I suppose I must not expect you to consider me. You might open your heart to Austin. As to my consent, knowing what I do, you will have to tear it out of me. Here 's a country perfectly contented, and that fellow at work digging up grievances to persuade the people they 're oppressed by us. Why should I talk of it? He can't do much harm; unless he has money—money! Romfrey says he means to start a furious paper. He 'll make a bonfire of himself. I can't stand by and see you in it too. I may die; I may be spared the sight.'

Cecilia flung her arms round his neck. 'Oh! papa.'

'I don't want to make him out worse than he is, my dear. I own to his gallantry—in the French sense as well as the English, it seems! It 's natural that Romfrey should excuse his wife. She 's another of the women who are crazy about Nevil Beauchamp. She spoke to me of the "pleasant visit of her French friends," and would have enlarged on it, but Romfrey stopped her. By the way, he proposes Captain Baskelett for you, and we 're to look for Baskelett's coming here, backed by his uncle. There 's no end to it; there never will be till you 're married: and no peace for me! I hope I shan't find myself with a cold to-morrow.'

The colonel coughed, and perhaps exaggerated the premonitory symptoms of a cold.

'Italy, papa, would do you good,' said Cecilia.

'It might,' said he.

'If we go immediately, papa; to-morrow, early in the morning, before there is a chance of any visitors coming to the house.'

'From Bevisham?'

'From Steynham. I cannot endure a second persecution.'

'But you have a world of packing, my dear.'

'An hour before breakfast will be sufficient for me.'

'In that case, we might be off early, as you say, and have part of the Easter week in Rome.'

'Mr. Austin wishes it greatly, papa, though he has not mentioned it.'

'Austin, my darling girl, is not one of your impatient men who burst with everything they have in their heads or their hearts.'

'Oh! but I know him so well,' said Cecilia, conjuring up that innocent enthusiasm of hers for Mr. Austin as an antidote to her sharp suffering. The next minute she looked on her father as the key of an enigma concerning Seymour Austin, whom, she imagined, possibly she had not hitherto known at all. Her curiosity to pierce it faded. She and her maid were packing through the night. At dawn she requested her maid to lift the window-blind and give her an opinion of the weather. 'Grey, Miss,' the maid reported. It signified to Cecilia: no one roaming outside.

The step she was taking was a desperate attempt at a cure; and she commenced it, though sorely wounded, with pity for Nevil's disappointment, and a singularly clear-eyed perception of his aims and motives.—'I am rich, and he wants riches; he likes me, and he reads my weakness.'—Jealousy shook her by fits, but she had no right to be jealous, nor any right to reproach him. Her

task was to climb back to those heavenly heights she sat on before he distracted her and drew her down.

Beauchamp came to a vacated house that day.

CHAPTER XLVI

AS IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN FORESEEN

It was in Italy that Cecilia's maiden dreams of life had opened. She hoped to recover them in Italy, and the calm security of a mind untainted. Italy was to be her reviving air.

While this idea of a specific for her malady endured—travelling at speed to the ridges of the Italian frontier, across France—she simply remembered Nevil: he was distant; he had no place in the storied landscape, among the images of Art and the names of patient great men who bear, as they bestow, an atmosphere other than earth's for those adoring them. If at night, in her sleep, he was a memory that conducted her through scenes which were lightnings, the cool swift morning of her flight released her. France, too, her rival!—the land of France, personified by her instinctively, though she had no vivid imaginative gift, did not wound her with a poisoned dart. —'She knew him first: she was his first love.' The Alps, and the sense of having Italy below them, renewed Cecilia's lofty-perching youth. Then—I am in Italy! she sighed with rapture. The wine of delight and oblivion was at her lips.

But thirst is not enjoyment, and a satiated thirst that we insist on over-satisfying to drown the recollection of past anguish, is baneful to the soul. In Rome Cecilia's vision of her track to Rome was of a run of fire over a

heath. She could scarcely feel common pleasure in Rome. It seemed burnt out.

Flung back on herself, she was condemned to undergo the bitter torment she had flown from: jealous love, and reproachful; and a shame in it like nothing she had yet experienced. Previous pains were but Summer lightnings, passing shadows. She could have believed in sorcery:—the man had eaten her heart!

A disposition to mocking humour, foreign to her nature, gave her the notion of being off her feet, in the claws of a fabulous bird. It served to veil her dulness. An ultra-English family in Rome, composed, shocking to relate, of a baronet banker and his wife, two faint-faced girls, and a young gentleman of our country, once perhaps a light-limbed boy, chose to be followed by their footman in the melancholy pomp of state livery. Wherever she encountered them Cecilia talked Nevil Beauchamp. Even Mr. Tuckham perceived it. She was extremely uncharitable: she extended her ungenerous criticism to the institution of the footman: England, and the English, were lashed.

'These people are caricatures,' Tuckham said, in apology for poor England burlesqued abroad. 'You must not generalize on them. Footmen are footmen all the world over. The cardinals have a fine set of footmen.'

'They are at home. Those English sow contempt of us all over Europe. We cannot but be despised. One comes abroad foredoomed to share the sentiment. This is your middle-class! What society can they move in, that sanctions a vulgarity so perplexing? They have the air of ornaments on a cottager's parlour mantelpiece.'

Tuckham laughed. 'Something of that,' he said.

'Evidently they seek distinction, and they have it, of that kind,' she continued. 'It is not wonderful that we have so much satirical writing in England, with such

objects of satire. It may be as little wonderful that the satire has no effect. Immense wealth and native obtuseness combine to disfigure us with this aspect of overripeness, not to say monstrosity. I fall in love with the poor, and think they have a cause to be pleaded, when I look at those people. We scoff at the vanity of the French, but it is a graceful vanity; pardonable compared with ours.'

'I 've read all that a hundred times,' quoth Tuckham bluntly.

'So have I. I speak of it because I see it. We scoff at the simplicity of the Germans.'

'The Germans live in simple fashion, because they 're poor. French vanity 's pretty and amusing. I don't know whether it 's deep in them, for I doubt their depth; but I know it 's in their joints. The first spring of a Frenchman comes of vanity. That you can't say of the English. Peace to all! but I abhor cosmopolitanism. No man has a firm foothold who pretends to it. None despises the English in reality. Don't be misled, Miss Halkett. We 're solid: that is the main point. The world feels our power, and has confidence in our good faith. I ask for no more.'

'With Germans we are supercilious Celts; with Frenchmen we are sneering Teutons:—Can we be loved, Mr. Tuckham?'

'That 's a quotation from my friend Lydiard. Loved? No nation ever was loved while it lived. As Lydiard says, it may be a good beast or a bad, but a beast it is. A nation 's much too big for refined feelings and affections. It must be powerful or out of the way, or down it goes. When a nation 's dead you may love it; but I don't see the use of dying to be loved. My aim for my country is to have the land respected. For that purpose we must have power; for power wealth; for wealth industry;

for industry internal peace: therefore no agitation, no artificial divisions. All 's plain in history and fact, so long as we do not obtrude sentimentalism. Nothing mixes well with that stuff—except poetical ideas!'

Contrary to her anticipation, Cecilia was thrown more into companionship with Mr. Tuckham than with Mr. Austin; and though it often vexed her, she acknowledged that she derived a benefit from his robust antagonism of opinion. And Italy had grown tasteless to her. She could hardly simulate sufficient curiosity to serve for a vacant echo to Mr. Austin's historic ardour. Pliny the Younger might indeed be the model of a gentleman of old Rome; there might be a scholarly pleasure in calculating, as Mr. Austin did, the length of time it took Pliny to journey from the city to his paternal farm, or villa overlooking the lake, or villa overlooking the bay, and some abstruse fun in the tender ridicule of his readings of his poems to friends; for Mr. Austin smiled effusively in alluding to the illustrious Roman pleader's foible of verse: but Pliny bore no resemblance to that island barbarian Nevil Beauchamp: she could not realize the friend of Trajan, orator, lawyer, student, statesman, benefactor of his kind, and model of her own modern English gentleman, though he was. 'Yes!' she would reply encouragingly to Seymour Austin's fond brooding hum about his hero; and 'Yes!' conclusively: like an incarnation of stupidity dealing in monosyllables. She was unworthy of the society of a scholar. Nor could she kneel at the feet of her especial heroes: Dante, Raphael, Buonarotti: she was unworthy of them. She longed to be at Mount Laurels. Mr. Tuckham's conversation was the nearest approach to it—as it were round by Greenland; but it was homeward.

She was really grieved to lose him. Business called him to England.

'What business can it be, papa?' she inquired: and the colonel replied briefly: 'Ours.'

Mr. Austin now devoted much of his time to the instruction of her in the ancient life of the Eternal City. He had certain volumes of Livy, Niebuhr, and Gibbon, from which he read her extracts at night, shunning the scepticism and the irony of the moderns, so that there should be no jar on the awakening interest of his fair pupil and patient. A gentle cross-hauling ensued between them, that they grew conscious of and laughed over during their peregrinations in and out of Rome: she pulled for the Republic of the Scipios; his predilections were toward the Rome of the wise and clement emperors. To Cecilia's mind Rome rocked at a period so closely neighbouring her decay: to him, with an imagination brooding on the fuller knowledge of it, the city breathed securely, the sky was clear; jurisprudence, rhetoric, statesmanship, then flourished supreme, and men eminent for culture: the finest flowers of our race, he thought them: and he thought their Age the manhood of Rome.

Struck suddenly by a feminine subtle comparison that she could not have framed in speech, Cecilia bowed to his views of the happiness and elevation proper to the sway of a sagacious and magnanimous Imperialism of the Roman pattern:—he rejected the French. She mused on dim old thoughts of the gracious dignity of a woman's life under high governorship. Turbulent young men imperilled it at every step. The trained, the grave, the partly grey, were fitting lords and mates for women aspiring to moral beauty and distinction. Beside such they should be planted, if they would climb! Her walks and conversations with Seymour Austin charmed her as the haze of a summer evening charms the sight.

Upon the conclusion of her term of exile Cecilia would

gladly have remained in Italy another month. An appointment of her father's with Mr. Tuckham at Mount Laurels on a particular day she considered as of no consequence whatever, and she said so, in response to a meaningless nod. But Mr. Austin was obliged to return to work. She set her face homeward with his immediately, and he looked pleased: he did not try to dissuade her from accompanying him by affecting to think it a sacrifice: clearly he knew that to be near him was her greatest delight.

Thus do we round the perilous headland called love: by wooing a good man for his friendship, and requiting him with faithful esteem for the grief of an ill-fortuned passion of his youth!

Cecilia would not suffer her fancy to go very far in pursuit of the secret of Mr. Austin's present feelings. Until she reached Mount Laurels she barely examined her own. The sight of the house warned her instantly that she must have a defence: and then, in desperation but with perfect distinctness, she entertained the hope of hearing him speak the protecting words which could not be broken through when wedded to her consent.

If Mr. Austin had no intentions, it was at least strange that he did not part from her in London.

He whose coming she dreaded had been made aware of the hour of her return, as his card, with the pencilled line, 'Will call on the 17th,' informed her. The 17th was the morrow.

After breakfast on the morning of the 17th Seymour Austin looked her in the eyes longer than it is customary for ladies to have to submit to keen inspection.

'Will you come into the library?' he said.

She went with him into the library.

Was it to speak of his anxiousness as to the state of her father's health that he had led her there, and that he

held her hand? He alarmed her, and he pacified her alarm, yet bade her reflect on the matter, saying that her father, like other fathers, would be more at peace upon the establishment of his daughter. Mr. Austin remarked that the colonel was troubled.

'Does he wish for my pledge never to marry without his approval? I will give it,' said Cecilia.

'He would like you to undertake to marry the man of his choice.'

Cecilia's features hung on an expression equivalent to: —'I could almost do that.'

At the same time she felt it was not Seymour Austin's manner of speaking. He seemed to be praising an unknown person—some gentleman who was rough, but of solid promise and singular strength of character.

The house-bell rang. Believing that Beauchamp had now come, she showed a painful ridging of the brows, and Mr. Austin considerately mentioned the name of the person he had in his mind.

She readily agreed with him regarding Mr. Tuckham's excellent qualities—if that was indeed the name; and she hastened to recollect how little she had forgotten Mr. Tuckham's generosity to Beauchamp, and confessed to herself it might as well have been forgotten utterly for the thanks he had received. While revolving these ideas she was listening to Mr. Austin; gradually she was beginning to understand that she was parting company with her original conjectures, but going at so swift a pace in so supple and sure a grasp, that, like the speeding train slipped on new lines of rails by the pointsman, her hurrying sensibility was not shocked, or the shock was imperceptible, when she heard him proposing Mr. Tuckham to her for a husband, by her father's authority, and with his own warm seconding. He had not dropped her hand: he was very eloquent, a masterly advocate: he

pleaded her father's cause; it was not put to her as Mr. Tuckham's: her father had set his heart on this union: he was awaiting her decision.

'Is it so urgent?' she asked.

'It is urgent. It saves him from an annoyance. He requires a son-in-law whom he can confidently rely on to manage the estates, which you are woman of the world enough to know should be in strong hands. He gives you to a man of settled principles. It is urgent, because he may wish to be armed with your answer at any instant.'

Her father entered the library. He embraced her, and 'Well?' he said.

'I must think, papa, I must think.'

She pressed her hand across her eyes. Disillusioned by Seymour Austin, she was utterly defenceless before Beauchamp: and possibly Beauchamp was in the house. She fancied he was, by the impatient brevity of her father's voice.

Seymour Austin and Colonel Halkett left the room, and Blackburn Tuckham walked in, not the most entirely self-possessed of suitors, puffing softly under his breath, and blinking eyes as rapidly as a skylark claps wings on the ascent.

Half an hour later Beauchamp appeared. He asked to see the colonel, delivered himself of his pretensions and wishes to the colonel, and was referred to Cecilia; but Colonel Halkett declined to send for her. Beauchamp declined to postpone his proposal until the following day. He went outside the house and walked up and down the grass-plot.

Cecilia came to him at last.

'I hear, Nevil, that you are waiting to speak to me.'

'I 've been waiting some weeks. Shall I speak here?'

'Yes, here, quickly.'

'Before the house? I have come to ask you for your hand.'

'Mine? I cannot . . .'

'Step into the park with me. I ask you to marry me.'

'It is too late.'

CHAPTER XLVII

THE REFUSAL OF HIM

Passing from one scene of excitement to another, Cecilia was perfectly steeled for her bitter task; and having done that which separated her a sphere's distance from Beauchamp, she was cold, inaccessible to the face of him who had swayed her on flood and ebb so long, incapable of tender pity, even for herself. All she could feel was a harsh joy to have struck off her tyrant's fetters, with a determination to cherish it passionately lest she should presently be hating herself: for the shadow of such a possibility fell within the narrow circle of her strung sensations. But for the moment her delusion reached to the idea that she had escaped from him into freedom, when she said, 'It is too late.' Those words were the sum and voice of her long term of endurance. She said them hurriedly, almost in a whisper, in the manner of one changeing a theme of conversation for subjects happier and livelier, though none followed.

The silence bore back on her a suspicion of a faint reproachfulness in the words; and perhaps they carried a poetical tone, still more distasteful.

'You have been listening to tales of me,' said Beauchamp.

'Nevil, we can always be friends, the best of friends.'

'Were you astonished at my asking you for your hand? You said "mine?" as if you wondered. You have known my feelings for you. Can you deny that? I have reckoned on yours—too long?—But not falsely? No, hear me out. The truth is, I cannot lose you. And don't look so resolute. Overlook little wounds: I was never indifferent to you. How could I be—with eyes in my head? The colonel is opposed to me of course: he will learn to understand me better: but you and I! we cannot be mere friends. It 's like daylight blotted out —or the eyes gone blind:—Too late? Can you repeat it? I tried to warn you before you left England: I should have written a letter to put you on your guard against my enemies:—I find I have some: but a letter is sure to stumble; I should have been obliged to tell you that I do not stand on my defence; and I thought I should see you the next day. You went: and not a word for me! You gave me no chance. If you have no confidence in me I must bear it. I may say the story is false. With your hand in mine I would swear it.'

'Let it be forgotten,' said Cecilia, surprised and shaken to think that her situation required further explanations; fascinated and unnerved by simply hearing him. 'We are now—we are walking away from the house.'

'Do you object to a walk with me?'

They had crossed the garden plot and were at the gate of the park leading to the Western wood. Beauchamp swung the gate open. He cast a look at the clouds coming up from the South-west in folds of grey and silver.

'Like the day of our drive into Bevisham!—without the storm behind,' he said, and doated on her soft shut lips, and the mild sun-rays of her hair in sunless light. 'There are flowers that grow only in certain valleys, and your home is Mount Laurels, whatever your fancy may

be for Italy. You colour the whole region for me. When you were absent, you were here. I called here six times, and walked and talked with you.'

Cecilia set her face to the garden. Her heart had entered on a course of heavy thumping, like a sapper in the mine.

Pain was not unwelcome to her, but this threatened weakness.

What plain words could she use? If Mr. Tuckham had been away from the house, she would have found it easier to speak of her engagement; she knew not why. Or if the imperative communication could have been delivered in Italian or French, she was as little able to say why it should have slipped from her tongue without a critic shudder to arrest it. She was cold enough to revolve the words: betrothed, affianced, plighted: and reject them, pretty words as they are. Between the vulgarity of romantic language, and the baldness of commonplace, it seemed to her that our English gives us no choice; that we cannot be dignified in simplicity. And for some reason, feminine and remote, she now detested her 'hand' so much as to be unable to bring herself to the metonymic mention of it. The lady's difficulty was peculiar to sweet natures that have no great warmth of passion; it can only be indicated. Like others of the kind, it is traceable to the most delicate of sentiments, and to the flattest:—for Mr. Blackburn's Tuckham's figure was (she thought of it with no personal objection) not of the graceful order, neither cavalierly nor kingly: and imagining himself to say, 'I am engaged,' and he suddenly appearing on the field, Cecilia's whole mind was shocked: in so marked a way did he contrast with Beauchamp.

This was the effect of Beauchamp's latest words on her. He had disarmed her anger.

'We *must* have a walk to-day,' he said commandingly,

but it had stolen into him that he and she were not walking on the same bank of the river, though they were side by side: a chill water ran between them. As in other days, there hung her hand: but not to be taken. Incredible as it was, the icy sense of his having lost her benumbed him. Her beautiful face and beautiful tall figure, so familiar to him that they were like a possession, protested in his favour while they snatched her from him all the distance of the words 'too late.'

'Will you not give me one half-hour?'

'I am engaged,' Cecilia plunged and extricated herself, 'I am engaged to walk with Mr. Austin and papa.'

Beauchamp tossed his head. Something induced him to speak of Mr. Tuckham. 'The colonel has discovered his Tory young man! It 's an object as incomprehensible to me as a Tory working-man. I suppose I must take it that they exist. As for Blackburn Tuckham, I have nothing against him. He 's an honourable fellow enough, and would govern Great Britain as men of that rich middle-class rule their wives—with a strict regard for ostensible humanity and what the law allows them. His manners have improved. Your cousin Mary seems to like him: it struck me when I saw them together. Cecilia! one half-hour! You refuse me: you have not heard me. You will not say too late.'

'Nevil, I have said it finally. I have no longer the right to conceive it unsaid.'

'So we speak! It 's the language of indolence, temper, faint hearts. "Too late" has no meaning. Turn back with me to the park. I offer you my whole heart; I love you. There 's no woman living who could be to me the wife you would be. I 'm like your male nightingale that you told me of: I must have my mate to sing to—that is, work for and live for; and she must not delay too long. Did *I*? Pardon me if you think I did. You have known

I love you. I have been distracted by things that kept me from thinking of myself and my wishes: and love 's a selfish business while . . . while one has work in hand. It 's clear I can't do two things at a time—make love and carry on my taskwork. I have been idle for weeks. I believed you were mine and wanted no lovemaking. There 's no folly in that, if you understand me at all. As for vanity about women, I 've outlived it. In comparison with you I 'm poor, I know:—you look distressed, but one has to allude to it:—I admit that wealth would help me. To see wealth supporting the cause of the people for once would—but you say, too late! Well, I don't renounce you till I see you giving your hand to a man who 's not myself. You have been offended: groundlessly, on my honour! You are the woman of all women in the world to hold me fast in faith and pride in you. It 's useless to look icy: you feel what I say.'

'Nevil, I feel grief, and beg you to cease. I am . . . It is——'

'"Too late" has not a rag of meaning, Cecilia! I love your name. I love this too: this is mine, and no one can rob me of it.'

He drew forth a golden locket and showed her a curl of her hair.

Crimsoning, she said instantly: 'Language of the kind I used is open to misconstruction, I fear. I have not even the right to listen to you. I am . . . You ask me for what I have it no longer in my power to give. I am engaged.'

The shot rang through him and partly stunned him; but incredulity made a mocking effort to sustain him. The greater wounds do not immediately convince us of our fate, though we may be conscious that we have been hit.

'Engaged in earnest?' said he.

'Yes.'

'Of your free will?'

'Yes.'

Her father stepped out on the terrace, from one of the open windows, trailing a newspaper like a pocket-handkerchief. Cecilia threaded the flower-beds to meet him.

'Here 's an accident to one of our ironclads,' he called to Beauchamp.

'Lives lost, sir?'

'No, thank heaven! but, upon my word, it 's a warning. Read the telegram; it 's the Hastings. If these are our defences, at a cost of half a million of money, each of them, the sooner we look to our land forces the better.'

'The Shop will not be considered safe!' said Beauchamp, taking in the telegram at a glance. 'Peppel 's a first-rate officer too: she couldn't have had a better captain. Ship seriously damaged!'

He handed back the paper to the colonel.

Cecilia expected him to say that he had foreseen such an event.

He said nothing; and with a singular contraction of the heart she recollected how he had denounced our system of preparing mainly for the defensive in war, on a day when they stood together in the park, watching the slow passage of that very ship, the Hastings, along the broad water, distant below them. The '*swarms of swift vessels of attack*,' she recollected particularly, and '*small wasps and rams under mighty steam-power*,' that he used to harp on when declaring that England must be known for the assailant in war: she was to 'ray out' her worrying fleets. '*The defensive is perilous policy in war*': he had said it. She recollected also her childish ridicule of his excess of emphasis: he certainly had foresight.'

Mr. Austin and Mr. Tuckham came strolling in conversation round the house to the terrace. Beauchamp

bowed to the former, nodded to the latter, scrutinizing him after he had done so, as if the flash of a thought were in his mind. Tuckham's radiant aspect possibly excited it: 'Congratulate me!' was the honest outcry of his face and frame. He was as overflowingly rosy as a victorious candidate at the hustings commencing a speech. Cecilia laid her hand on an urn, in dread of the next words from either of the persons present. Her father put an arm in hers, and leaned on her. She gazed at her chamber window above, wishing to be wafted thither to her seclusion within. The trembling limbs of physical irresoluteness was a new experience to her.

'Anything else in the paper, colonel? I 've not seen it to-day,' said Beauchamp, for the sake of speaking.

'No, I don't think there 's anything,' Colonel Halkett replied. 'Our diplomatists haven't been shining much: that 's not our forte.'

'No: it 's our field for younger sons.'

'Is it? Ah! There 's an expedition against the hill-tribes in India, and we 're such a peaceful nation, eh? We look as if we were in for a complication with China.'

'Well, sir, we must sell our opium.'

'Of course we must. There 's a man writing about surrendering Gibraltar!'

'I 'm afraid we can't do that.'

'But where do you draw the line?' quoth Tuckham, very susceptible to a sneer at the colonel, and entirely ignorant of the circumstances attending Beauchamp's position before him. 'You defend the Chinaman; and it 's questionable if his case is as good as the Spaniard's.'

'The Chinaman has a case against our traders. Gibraltar concerns our imperial policy.'

'As to the case against the English merchants, the Chinaman is for shutting up his millions of acres of productive land, and the action of commerce is merely a

declaration of a universal public right, to which all States must submit.'

'Immorality brings its punishment, be sure of that. Some day we shall have enough of China. As to the Rock, I know the argument; I may be wrong. I 've had the habit of regarding it as necessary to our naval supremacy.'

'Come! there we agree.'

'I 'm not so certain.'

'The counter-argument, I call treason.'

'Well,' said Beauchamp, 'there 's a broad policy, and a narrow. There 's the Spanish view of the matter—if you are for peace and harmony and disarmament.'

'I 'm not.'

'Then strengthen your forces.'

'Not a bit of it!'

'Then bully the feeble and truckle to the strong; consent to be hated till you have to stand your ground.'

'Talk!'

'It seems to me logical.'

'That 's the French notion—c'est lodgique!'

Tuckham's pronunciation caused Cecilia to level her eyes at him passingly.

'By the way,' said Colonel Halkett, 'there are lots of horrors in the paper to-day; wife kickings, and starvations—oh, dear me! and the murder of a woman: two columns to that.'

'That, the Tory reaction is responsible for!' said Tuckham, rather by way of a joke than a challenge.

Beauchamp accepted it as a challenge. Much to the benevolent amusement of Mr. Austin and Colonel Halkett, he charged the responsibility of every crime committed in the country, and every condition of misery, upon the party which declined to move in advance, and which *therefore* apologized for the perpetuation of knavery, villany, brutality, injustice, and foul dealing.

'Stick to your laws and systems and institutions, and so long as you won't stir to amend them, I hold you accountable for that long newspaper list daily.'

He said this with a visible fire of conviction.

Tuckham stood bursting at the monstrousness of such a statement.

He condensed his indignant rejoinder to: 'Madness can't go farther!'

'There 's an idea in it,' said Mr. Austin.

'It 's an idea foaming at the mouth, then!'

'Perhaps it has no worse fault than that of not marching parallel with the truth,' said Mr. Austin, smiling. 'The party accusing in those terms . . . what do you say, Captain Beauchamp?—supposing us to be pleading before a tribunal?'

Beauchamp admitted as much as that he had made the case gigantic, though he stuck to his charge against the Tory party. And moreover: the Tories—and the old Whigs, now Liberals, ranked under the heading of Tories—those Tories possessing and representing the wealth of the country, yet had not started one respectable journal that a lady could read through without offence to her, or a gentleman without disgust! If there was not one English newspaper in existence independent of circulation and advertisements, and of the tricks to win them, the Tories were answerable for the vacancy. They, being the rich who, if they chose, could set an example to our Press by subscribing to maintain a Journal superior to the flattering of vile appetites—'all that nauseous matter,' Beauchamp stretched his fingers at the sheets Colonel Halkett was holding, and which he had not read—'those Tories,' he bowed to the colonel, 'I 'm afraid I must say you, sir, are answerable for it.'

'I am very well satisfied with my paper,' said the colonel.

Beauchamp sighed to himself. 'We choose to be satisfied,' he said. His pure and mighty Dawn was in his thoughts: the unborn light of a day denied to earth!

One of the doctors of Bevisham, visiting a sick maid of the house, trotted up the terrace to make his report to her master of the state of her health. He hoped to pull her through with the aid of high feeding. He alluded cursorily to a young girl living on the outskirts of the town, whom he had been called in to see at the eleventh hour, and had lost, owing to the lowering of his patient from a prescription of a vegetable diet by a certain Dr. Shrapnel.

That ever-explosive name precipitated Beauchamp to the fronk rank of the defence.

'I happen to be staying with Dr. Shrapnel,' he observed. 'I don't eat meat there because he doesn't, and I am certain I take no harm by avoiding it. I think vegetarianism a humaner system, and hope it may be wise. I should like to set the poor practising it, for their own sakes; and I have half an opinion that it would be good for the rich—if we are to condemn gluttony.'

'Ah? Captain Beauchamp!' the doctor bowed to him. 'But my case was one of poor blood requiring to be strengthened. The girl was allowed to sink so low that stimulants were ineffective when I stepped in. There 's the point. It 's all very well while you are in health. You may do without meat till your system demands the stimulant, or else—as with this poor girl! And, indeed, Captain Beauchamp, if I may venture the remark—I had the pleasure of seeing you during the last Election in our town—and if I may be so bold, I should venture to hint that the avoidance of animal food—to judge by appearances—has not been quite wholesome for you.'

Eyes were turned on Beauchamp.

CHAPTER XLVIII

OF THE TRIAL AWAITING THE EARL OF ROMFREY

Cecilia softly dropped her father's arm, and went into the house. The exceeding pallor of Beauchamp's face haunted her in her room. She heard the controversy proceeding below, and an exclamation of Blackburn Tuckham's: 'Immorality of meat-eating? What nonsense are they up to now?'

Beauchamp was inaudible, save in a word or two. As usual, he was the solitary minority.

But how mournfully changed he was! She had not noticed it, agitated by her own emotions as she had been, and at one time three parts frozen. He was the ghost of the Nevil Beauchamp who had sprung on the deck of the Esperanza out of Lieutenant Wilmore's boat, that sunny breezy day which was the bright first chapter of her new life—of her late life, as it seemed to her now, for she was dead to it, and another creature, the coldest of the women of earth. She felt sensibly cold, coveted warmth, flung a shawl on her shoulders, and sat in a corner of her room, hidden and shivering beside the open window, till long after the gentlemen had ceased to speak.

How much he must have suffered of late! The room she had looked to as a refuge from Nevil was now her stronghold against the man whom she had incredibly accepted. She remained there, the victim of a heart malady, under the term of headache. Feeling entrapped, she considered that she must have been encircled and betrayed. She looked back on herself as a giddy figure falling into a pit: and in the pit she lay.

And how vile to have suspected of unfaithfulness and

sordidness the generous and stedfast man of earth! He never abandoned a common friendship. His love of his country was love still, whatever the form it had taken. His childlike reliance on effort and outspeaking, for which men laughed at him, was beautiful.

Where am I? she cried amid her melting images of him, all dominated by his wan features. She was bound fast, imprisoned and a slave. Even Mr. Austin had conspired against him: for only she read Nevil justly. His defence of Dr. Shrapnel filled her with an envy that no longer maligned the object of it, but was humble, and like the desire of the sick to creep into sunshine.

The only worthy thing she could think of doing was (it must be mentioned for a revelation of her fallen state, and, moreover, she was not lusty of health at the moment) to abjure meat. The body loathed it, and consequently the mind of the invalided lady shrank away in horror of the bleeding joints, and the increasingly fierce scramble of Christian souls for the dismembered animals: she saw the innocent pasturing beasts, she saw the act of slaughter. She had actually sweeping before her sight a spectacle of the ludicrous-terrific, in the shape of an entire community pursuing countless herds of poor scampering animal life for blood: she, meanwhile, with Nevil and Dr. Shrapnel, stood apart contemning. For whoso would not partake of flesh in this kingdom of roast beef must be of the sparse number of Nevil's execrated minority in politics.

The example will show that she touched the borders of delirium. Physically, the doctor pronounces her bilious. She was in earnest so far as to send down to the library for medical books, and books upon diet. These, however, did not plead for the beasts. They treated the subject without question of man's taking that which he has conquered. Poets and philosophers did the same. Again she beheld Nevil Beauchamp solitary in the adverse rank to

the world;—to his countrymen especially. But that it was no material cause which had wasted his cheeks and lined his forehead, she was sure: and to starve with him, to embark with him in his little boat on the seas he whipped to frenzy, would have been a dream of bliss, had she dared to contemplate herself in a dream as his companion.

It was not to be thought of.

No: but this was, and to be thought of seriously: Cecilia had said to herself for consolation that Beauchamp was no spiritual guide; he had her heart within her to plead for him, and the reflection came to her, like a bubble up from the heart, that most of our spiritual guides neglect the root to trim the flower: and thence, turning sharply on herself, she obtained a sudden view of her allurement and her sin in worshipping herself, and recognized that the aim at an ideal life closely approaches, or easily inclines, to self-worship; to which the lady was woman and artist enough to have had no objection, but that therein visibly she discerned the retributive vain longings, in the guise of high individual superiority and distinction, that had thwarted her with Nevil Beauchamp, never permitting her to love single-mindedly or whole-heartedly, but always in reclaiming her rights and sighing for the loss of her ideal; adoring her own image, in fact, when she pretended to cherish, and regret that she could not sufficiently cherish, the finer elements of nature. What was this ideal she had complained of losing? It was a broken mirror: she could think of it in no other form.

Dr. Shrapnel's 'Ego-Ego' yelped and gave chase to her through the pure beatitudes of her earlier days down to her present regrets. It hunted all the saints in the calendar till their haloes top-sided on their heads—her favourite St. Francis of Assisi excepted.

The doctor was called up from Bevisham next day, and pronounced her bilious. He was humorous over Captain

Beauchamp, who had gone to the parents of the dead girl, and gathered the information that they were a consumptive family, to vindicate Dr. Shrapnel. 'The very family to require strong nourishment,' said the doctor.

Cecilia did not rest in her sick-room before, hunting through one book and another, she had found arguments on the contrary side; a waste of labour that heaped oppression on her chest, as with the world's weight. Apparently one had only to be in Beauchamp's track to experience that. She horrified her father by asking questions about consumption. Homœopathy, hydropathy,—the revolutionaries of medicine attracted her. Blackburn Tuckham, a model for an elected lover who is not beloved, promised to procure all sorts of treatises for her: no man could have been so deferential to a diseased mind. Beyond calling her by her Christian name, he did nothing to distress her with the broad aspect of their new relations together. He and Mr. Austin departed from Mount Laurels, leaving her to sink into an agreeable stupor, like one deposited on a mudbank after buffeting the waves. She learnt that her father had seen Captain Baskelett, and remembered, marvelling, how her personal dread of an interview, that threatened to compromise her ideal of her feminine and peculiar dignity, had assisted to precipitate her where she now lay helpless, almost inanimate.

She was unaware of the passage of time save when her father spoke of a marriage-day. It told her that she lived and was moving. The fear of death is not stronger in us, nor the desire to put it off, than Cecilia's shunning of such a day. The naming of it numbed her blood like a snake-bite. Yet she openly acknowledged her engagement; and, happily for Tuckham, his visits, both in London and at Mount Laurels, were few and short, and he inflicted no foretaste of her coming subjection to him to alarm her.

Under her air of calm abstraction she watched him rigorously for some sign of his ownership that should tempt her to revolt from her pledge, or at least dream of breaking loose: the dream would have sufficed. He was never intrusive, never pressing. He did not vex, because he absolutely trusted to the noble loyalty which made her admit to herself that she belonged irrevocably to him, while her thoughts were upon Beauchamp. With a respectful gravity he submitted to her perusal a collection of treatises on diet, classed *pro* and *con.*, and paged and pencil-marked to simplify her study of the question. They sketched in company; she played music to him, he read poetry to her, and read it well. He seemed to feel the beauty of it sensitively, as she did critically. In other days the positions had been reversed. He invariably talked of Beauchamp with kindness, deploring only that he should be squandering his money on workmen's halls and other hazy projects down in Bevisham.

'Lydiard tells me he has a very sound idea of the value of money, and has actually made money by cattle breeding; but he has flung ten thousand pounds on a single building outside the town, and he 'll have to endow it to support it —a Club to educate Radicals. The fact is, he wants to jam the business of two or three centuries into a life-time. These men of their so-called progress are like the majority of religious minds: they can't believe without seeing and touching. That is to say, they don't believe in the abstract at all, but they go to work blindly by agitating, and proselytizing, and persecuting to get together a mass they can believe in. You see it in their way of arguing; it 's half done with the fist. Lydiard tells me he left him last in a horrible despondency about progress. Ha! ha! Beauchamp 's no Radical. He hasn't forgiven the Countess of Romfrey for marrying above her rank. He may be a bit of a Republican: but really in this country

Republicans are fighting with the shadow of an old hat and a cockhorse. I beg to state that I have a reverence for constituted authority: I speak of what those fellows are contending with.'

'Right,' said Colonel Halkett. 'But "the shadow of an old hat and a cockhorse": what does that mean?'

'That 's what our Republicans are hitting at, sir.'

'Ah! so; yes,' quoth the colonel. 'And I say this to Nevil Beauchamp, that what we 've grown up well with, powerfully with, it 's base ingratitude and dangerous folly to throw over.'

He blamed Beauchamp for ingratitude to the countess, who had, he affirmed of his own knowledge, married Lord Romfrey to protect Beauchamp's interests.

A curious comment on this allegation was furnished by the announcement of the earl's expectations of a son and heir. The earl wrote to Colonel Halkett from Romfrey Castle inviting him to come and spend some time there.

'Now, that 's brave news!' the colonel exclaimed.

He proposed a cruise round by the Cornish coast to the Severn, and so to Romfrey Castle, to squeeze the old lord's hand and congratulate him with all his heart. Cecilia was glad to acquiesce, for an expedition of any description was a lull in the storm that hummed about her ears in the peace of home, where her father would perpetually speak of the day to be fixed. Sailing the sea on a cruise was like the gazing at wonderful colours of a Western sky: an oblivion of earthly dates and obligations. What mattered it that there were gales in August? She loved the sea, and the stinging salt spray, and circling gull and plunging gannet, the sun on the waves, and the torn cloud. The revelling libertine open sea wedded her to Beauchamp in that veiled cold spiritual manner she could muse on as a circumstance out of her life.

Fair companies of racing yachts were left behind. The

gales of August mattered frightfully to poor Blackburn Tuckham, who was to be dropped at a town in South Wales, and descended greenish to his cabin as soon as they had crashed on the first wall-waves of the chalk-race, a throw beyond the peaked cliffs edged with cormorants, and were really tasting sea. Cecilia reclined on deck, wrapped in shawl and waterproof. As the Alpine climber claims the upper air, she had the wild sea to herself through her love of it; quite to herself. It was delicious to look round and ahead, and the perturbation was just enough to preserve her from thoughts too deep inward in a scene where the ghost of Nevil was abroad.

The hard dry gale increased. Her father, stretched beside her, drew her attention to a small cutter under double-reefed main-sail and small jib on the Esperanza's weather bow—a gallant boat carefully handled. She watched it with some anxiety, but the Esperanza was bound for a Devon bay, and bore away from the black Dorsetshire headland, leaving the little cutter to run into haven if she pleased. The passing her was no event.—In a representation of the common events befalling us in these times, upon an appreciation of which this history depends, one turns at whiles a languishing glance toward the vast potential mood, pluperfect tense. For Nevil Beauchamp was on board the cutter, steering her, with Dr. Shrapnel and Lydiard in the well, and if an accident had happened to cutter or schooner, what else might not have happened? Cecilia gathered it from Mrs. Wardour-Devereux, whom, to her surprise and pleasure, she found at Romfrey Castle. Her friend Louise received a letter from Mr. Lydiard, containing a literary amateur seaman's log of a cruise of a fifteen-ton cutter in a gale, and a pure literary sketch of Beauchamp standing drenched at the helm from five in the morning up to nine at night, munching a biscuit for nourishment. The beautiful widow

prepared the way for what was very soon to be publicly known concerning herself by reading out this passage of her correspondent's letter in the breakfast room.

'Yes, the fellow 's a sailor!' said Lord Romfrey.

The countess rose from her chair and walked out.

'Now, was that abuse of the fellow?' the old lord asked Colonel Halkett. 'I said he was a sailor, I said nothing else. He is a sailor, and he 's fit for nothing else, and no ship will he get unless he bends his neck: never 's nearer it.'

He hesitated a moment, and went after his wife.

Cecilia sat with the countess, in the afternoon, at a window overlooking the swelling woods of Romfrey. She praised the loveliness of the view.

'It is fire to me,' said Rosamund.

Cecilia looked at her, startled. Rosamund said no more.

She was an excellent hostess, nevertheless, unpretending and simple in company; and only when it chanced that Beauchamp's name was mentioned did she cast that quick supplicating nervous glance at the earl, with a shadow of an elevation of her shoulders, as if in apprehension of mordant pain.

We will make no mystery about it. I would I could. Those happy tales of mystery are as much my envy as the popular narratives of the deeds of bread and cheese people, for they both create a tide-way in the attentive mind; the mysterious pricking our credulous flesh to creep, the familiar urging our obese imagination to constitutional exercise. And oh, the refreshment there is in dealing with characters either contemptibly beneath us or supernaturally above! My way is like a Rhone island in the summer drought, stony, unattractive and difficult between the two forceful streams of the unreal and the over-real, which delight mankind—honour to the

conjurors! My people conquer nothing, win none; they are actual, yet uncommon. It is the clock-work of the brain that they are directed to set in motion, and—poor troop of actors to vacant benches!—the conscience residing in thoughtfulness which they would appeal to; and if you are there impervious to them, we are lost: back I go to my wilderness, where, as you perceive, I have contracted the habit of listening to my own voice more than is good:—

The burden of a child in her bosom had come upon Rosamund with the visage of the Angel of Death fronting her in her path. She believed that she would die; but like much that we call belief, there was a kernel of doubt in it, which was lively when her frame was enlivened, and she then thought of the giving birth to this unloved child, which was to disinherit the man she loved, in whose interest solely (so she could presume to think, because it had been her motive reason) she had married the earl. She had no wish to be a mother; but that prospect, and the dread attaching to it at her time of life, she could have submitted to for Lord Romfrey's sake. It struck her like a scoffer's blow that she, the one woman on earth loving Nevil, should have become the instrument for dispossessing him. The revulsion of her feelings enlightened her so far as to suggest, without enabling her to fathom him, that instead of having cleverly swayed Lord Romfrey, she had been his dupe, or a blind accomplice; and though she was too humane a woman to think of punishing him, she had so much to forgive that the trifles daily and at any instant added to the load, flushed her resentment, like fresh lights showing new features and gigantic outlines. Nevil's loss of Cecilia she had anticipated; she had heard of it when she was lying in physical and mental apathy at Steynham. Lord Romfrey had repeated to her the nature of his replies to the searching parental questions of Colonel Halkett, and having foreseen it all, and what was more, foretold it,

she was not aroused from her torpor. Latterly, with the return of her natural strength, she had shown herself incapable of hearing her husband speak of Nevil; nor was the earl tardy in taking the hint to spare the mother of his child allusions that vexed her. Now and then they occurred perforce. The presence of Cecilia exasperated Rosamund's peculiar sensitiveness. It required Louise Wardour-Devereux's apologies and interpretations to account for what appeared to Cecilia strangely ill-conditioned, if not insane, in Lady Romfrey's behaviour. The most astonishing thing to hear was, that Lady Romfrey had paid Mrs. Devereux a visit at her Surrey house unexpectedly one Sunday in the London season, for the purpose, as it became evident, of meeting Mr. Blackburn Tuckham: and how she could have known that Mr. Tuckham would be there, Mrs. Devereux could not tell, for it was, Louise assured Cecilia, purely by chance that he and Mr. Lydiard were present: but the countess obtained an interview with him alone, and Mr. Tuckham came from it declaring it to have been more terrible than any he had ever been called upon to endure. The object of the countess was to persuade him to renounce his bride.

Louise replied to the natural inquiry—'Upon what plea?' with a significant evasiveness. She put her arms round Cecilia's neck: 'I trust you are not unhappy. You will get no release from him.'

'I am not unhappy,' said Cecilia, musically clear to convince her friend.

She was indeed glad to feel the stout chains of her anchor restraining her when Lady Romfrey talked of Nevil; they were like the safety of marriage without the dreaded ceremony, and with solitude to let her weep. Bound thus to a weaker man than Blackburn Tuckham, though he had been more warmly esteemed, her fancy would have drifted away over the deeps, perhaps her

cherished loyalty would have drowned in her tears—for Lady Romfrey tasked it very severely: but he from whom she could hope for no release, gave her some of the firmness which her nature craved in this trial.

From saying quietly to her: 'I thought once you loved him,' when alluding to Nevil, Lady Romfrey passed to mournful exclamations, and by degrees on to direct entreaties. She related the whole story of Renée in England, and appeared distressed with a desperate wonderment at Cecilia's mildness after hearing it. Her hearer would have imagined that she had no moral sense, if it had not been so perceptible that the poor lady's mind was distempered on the one subject of Nevil Beauchamp. Cecilia's high conception of duty, wherein she was a peerless flower of our English civilization, was incommunicable: she could practise, not explain it. She bowed to Lady Romfrey's praises of Nevil, suffered her hands to be wrung, her heart to be touched, all but an avowal of her love of him to be wrested from her, and not the less did she retain her cold resolution to marry to please her father and fulfil her pledge. In truth, it was too late to speak of Renée to her now. It did not beseem Cecilia to remember that she had ever been a victim of jealousy; and while confessing to many errors, because she felt them, and gained a necessary strength from them—in the comfort of the consciousness of pain, for example, which she sorely needed, that the pain in her own breast might deaden her to Nevil's,—jealousy, the meanest of the errors of a lofty soul, yielded no extract beyond the bare humiliation proper to an acknowledgement that it had existed: so she discarded the recollection of the passion which had wrought the mischief. Since we cannot have a peerless flower of civilization without artificial aid, it may be understood how it was that Cecilia could extinguish some lights in her mind and kindle others, and wherefore what it was not natural

for her to do, she did. She had, briefly, a certain control of herself.

Our common readings in the fictitious romances which mark out a plot and measure their characters to fit into it, had made Rosamund hopeful of the effect of that story of Renée. A wooden young woman, or a galvanized (sweet to the writer, either of them, as to the reader—so moveable they are!) would have seen her business at this point, and have glided melting to reconciliation and the chamber where romantic fiction ends joyously. Rosamund had counted on it.

She looked intently at Cecilia. 'He is ruined, wasted, ill, unloved; he has lost you—I am the cause!' she cried in a convulsion of grief.

'Dear Lady Romfrey!' Cecilia would have consoled her. 'There is nothing to lead us to suppose that Nevil is unwell, and you are not to blame for anything: how can you be?'

'I spoke falsely of Dr. Shrapnel; I am the cause. It lies on me! it pursues me. Let me give to the poor as I may, and feel for the poor, as I do, to get nearer to Nevil —I cannot have peace! His heart has turned from me. He despises me. If I had spoken to Lord Romfrey at Steynham, as he commanded me, you and he—Oh! cowardice: he is right, cowardice is the chief evil in the world. He is ill; he is desperately ill; he will die.'

'Have you heard he is very ill, Lady Romfrey?'

'No! no!' Rosamund exclaimed; 'it is by not hearing that I *know* it!'

With the assistance of Louise Devereux, Cecilia gradually awakened to what was going on in the house. There had been a correspondence between Miss Denham and the countess. Letters from Bevisham had suddenly ceased. Presumably the earl had stopped them: and if so it must have been for a tragic reason.

Cecilia hinted some blame of Lord Romfrey to her father.

He pressed her hand and said: 'You don't know what that man suffers. Romfrey is fond of Nevil too, but he must guard his wife; and the fact is Nevil is down with fever. It 's in the papers now; he may be able to conceal it, and I hope he will. There 'll be a crisis, and then he can tell her good news—a little illness and all right now! Of course,' the colonel continued buoyantly, 'Nevil will recover; he 's a tough wiry young fellow, but poor Romfrey's fears are natural enough about the countess. Her mind seems to be haunted by the doctor there—Shrapnel, I mean; and she 's exciteable to a degree that threatens the worst—in case of any accident in Bevisham.'

'Is it not a kind of cowardice to conceal it?' Cecilia suggested.

'It saves her from fretting,' said the colonel.

'But she is fretting! If Lord Romfrey would confide in her and trust to her courage, papa, it would be best.'

Colonel Halkett thought that Lord Romfrey was the judge.

Cecilia wished to leave a place where this visible torture of a human soul was proceeding, and to no purpose. She pointed out to her father, by a variety of signs, that Lady Romfrey either knew or suspected the state of affairs in Bevisham, and repeated her remarks upon Nevil's illness. But Colonel Halkett was restrained from departing by the earl's constant request to him to stay. Old friendship demanded it of him. He began to share his daughter's feelings at the sight of Lady Romfrey. She was outwardly patient and submissive; by nature she was a strong healthy woman; and she attended to all her husband's prescriptions for the regulating of her habits, walked with him, lay down for the afternoon's rest, appeared amused when he laboured to that effect, and did

her utmost to subdue the worm devouring her heart: but the hours of the delivery of the letter-post were fatal to her. Her woeful: 'No letter for me!' was piteous. When that was heard no longer, her silence and famished gaze chilled Cecilia. At night Rosamund eyed her husband expressionlessly, with her head leaning back in her chair, to the sorrow of the ladies beholding her. Ultimately the contagion of her settled misery took hold of Cecilia. Colonel Halkett was induced by his daughter and Mrs. Devereux to endeavour to combat a system that threatened consequences worse than those it was planned to avert. He by this time was aware of the serious character of the malady which had prostrated Nevil. Lord Romfrey had directed his own medical man to go down to Bevisham, and Dr. Gannet's report of Nevil was grave. The colonel made light of it to his daughter, after the fashion he condemned in Lord Romfrey, to whom however he spoke earnestly of the necessity for partially taking his wife into his confidence: to the extent of letting her know that a slight fever was running its course with Nevil.

'There will be no slight fever in my wife's blood,' said the earl. 'I stand to weather the cape or run to wreck, and it won't do to be taking in reefs on a lee-shore. You don't see what frets her, colonel. For years she has been bent on Nevil's marriage. It 's off: but if you catch Cecilia by the hand and bring her to us—I swear she loves the fellow!—that 's the medicine for my wife. Say: will you do it? Tell Lady Romfrey it shall be done. We shall stand upright again!'

'I 'm afraid that 's impossible, Romfrey,' said the colonel.

'Play at it, then! Let her think it. You 're helping me treat an invalid. Colonel! my old friend! You save my house and name if you do that. It 's a hand round a

candle in a burst of wind. There 's Nevil dragged by a woman into one of their reeking hovels—so that Miss Denham at Shrapnel's writes to Lady Romfrey—because the woman's drunken husband voted for him at the Election, and was kicked out of employment, and fell upon the gin-bottle, and the brats of the den died starving, and the man sickened of a fever; and Nevil goes in and sits with him! Out of that tangle of folly is my house to be struck down? It looks as if the fellow with his infernal "humanity," were the bad genius of an old nurse's tale. He 's a good fellow, colonel, he means well. This fever will cure him, they say it sobers like bloodletting. He 's a gallant fellow; you know that. He fought to the skeleton in our last big war. On my soul, I believe he 's good for a husband. Frenchwoman or not, that affair 's over. He shall have Steynham and Holdesbury. Can I say more? Now, colonel, you go in to the countess. Grasp my hand. Give me that help, and God bless you! You light up my old days. She 's a noble woman: I would not change her against the best in the land. She has this craze about Nevil. I suppose she 'll never get over it. But there it is: and we must feed her with the spoon.'

Colonel Halkett argued stutteringly with the powerful man: 'It 's the truth she ought to hear, Romfrey; indeed it is, if you 'll believe me. It 's his life she is fearing for. She knows half.'

'She knows positively nothing, colonel. Miss Denham's first letter spoke of the fellow's having headaches, and staggering. He was out on a cruise, and saw your schooner pass, and put into some port, and began falling right and left, and they got him back to Shrapnel's: and here it is—that if you go to him you 'll save him, and if you go to my wife you 'll save her: and there you have it: and I ask my old friend, I beg him to go to them both.'

'But you can't surely expect me to force my daughter's inclinations, my dear Romfrey?'

'Cecilia loves the fellow!'

'She is engaged to Mr. Tuckham.'

'I 'll see the man Tuckham.'

'Really, my dear lord!'

'Play at it, Halkett, play at it! Tide us over this! Talk to her: hint it and nod it. We have to round November. I could strangle the world till that month's past. You 'll own,' he added mildly after his thunder, 'I 'm not much of the despot Nevil calls me. She has not a wish I don't supply. I 'm at her beck, and everything that 's mine. She 's a brave good woman. I don't complain. I run my chance. But if we lose the child —good night! Boy or girl!—boy!'

Lord Romfrey flung an arm up. The child of his old age lived for him already: he gave it all the life he had. This miracle, this young son springing up on an earth decaying and dark, absorbed him. This reviver of his ancient line must not be lost. Perish every consideration to avert it! He was ready to fear, love, or hate terribly, according to the prospects of his child.

Colonel Halkett was obliged to enter into a consultation, of a shadowy sort, with his daughter, whose only advice was that they should leave the castle. The penetrable gloom there, and the growing apprehension concerning the countess and Nevil, tore her to pieces. Even if she could have conspired with the earl to hoodwink his wife, her strong sense told her it would be fruitless, besides base. Father and daughter had to make the stand against Lord Romfrey. He saw their departure from the castle gates, and kissed his hand to Cecilia, courteously, without a smile.

'He may well praise the countess, papa,' said Cecilia, while they were looking back at the castle and the move-

less flag that hung in folds by the mast above it. 'She has given me her promise to avoid questioning him and to accept his view of her duty. She said to me that if Nevil should die she . . .'

Cecilia herself broke down, and gave way to sobs in her father's arms.

CHAPTER XLIX

A FABRIC OF BARONIAL DESPOTISM CRUMBLES

The earl's precautions did duty night and day in all the avenues leading to the castle and his wife's apartments; and he could believe that he had undertaken as good a defence as the mountain guarding the fertile vale from storms: but him the elements pelted heavily. Letters from acquaintances of Nevil, from old shipmates and from queer political admirers and opponents, hailed on him; things not to be frigidly read were related of the fellow.

Lord Romfrey's faith in the power of constitution to beat disease battled sturdily with the daily reports of his physician and friends, whom he had directed to visit the cottage on the common outside Bevisham, and with Miss Denham's intercepted letters to the countess. Still he had to calculate on the various injuries Nevil had done to his constitution, which had made of him another sort of man for a struggle of life and death than when he stood like a riddled flag through the war. That latest freak of the fellow's, the abandonment of our natural and wholesome sustenance in animal food, was to be taken in the reckoning. Dr. Gannet did not allude to it; the Bevisham doctor did; and the earl meditated with a fury of wrath on the dismal chance that such a folly as this of one

old vegetable idiot influencing a younger noodle, might strike his House to the dust.

His watch over his wife had grown mechanical: he failed to observe that her voice was missing. She rarely spoke. He lost the art of observing himself: the wrinkling up and dropping of his brows became his habitual language. So long as he had not to meet inquiries or face tears, he enjoyed the sense of security. He never quitted his wife save to walk to the Southern park lodge, where letters and telegrams were piled awaiting him; and she was forbidden to take the air on the castle terrace without his being beside her, lest a whisper, some accident of the kind that donkeys who nod over their drowsy nose-length-ahead precautions call fatality, should rouse her to suspect, and in a turn of the hand undo his labour: for the race was getting terrible: Death had not yet stepped out of that evil chamber in Dr. Shrapnel's cottage to aim his javelin at the bosom containing the prized young life to come, but, like the smoke of waxing fire, he shadowed forth his presence in wreaths blacker and thicker day by day: and Everard Romfrey knew that the hideous beast of darkness had only to spring up and pass his guard to deal a blow to his House the direr from all he supposed himself to have gained by masking it hitherto. The young life he looked to for renewal swallowed him: he partly lost human feeling for his wife in the tremendous watch and strain to hurry her as a vessel round the dangerous headland. He was oblivious that his eyebrows talked, that his head was bent low, that his mouth was shut, and that where a doubt had been sown, silence and such signs are like revelations in black night to the spirit of a woman who loves.

One morning after breakfast Rosamund hung on his arm, eyeing him neither questioningly nor invitingly, but long. He kissed her forehead. She clung to him and

closed her eyes, showing him a face of slumber, like a mask of the dead.

Mrs. Devereux was present. Cecilia had entreated her to stay with Lady Romfrey. She stole away, for the time had come which any close observer of the countess must have expected.

The earl lifted his wife, and carried her to her sitting-room. A sunless weltering September day whipped the window-panes and brought the roar of the beaten woods to her ears. He was booted and gaitered for his customary walk to the park lodge, and as he bent a knee beside her, she murmured: 'Don't wait; return soon.'

He placed a cord attached to the bellrope within her reach. This utter love of Nevil Beauchamp was beyond his comprehension, but there it was, and he had to submit to it and manœuvre. His letters and telegrams told the daily tale. 'He 's better,' said the earl, preparing himself to answer what his wife's look had warned him would come.

She was an image of peace, in the same posture on the couch where he had left her, when he returned. She did not open her eyes, but felt about for his hand, and touching it, she seemed to weigh the fingers.

At last she said: 'The fever should be at its height.'

'Why, my dear brave girl, what ails you?' said he.

'Ignorance.'

She raised her eyelids. His head was bent down over her, like a raven's watching, a picture of gravest vigilance.

Her bosom rose and sank. 'What has Miss Denham written to-day?'

'To-day?' he asked her gently.

'I shall bear it,' she answered. 'You were my master before you were my husband. I bear anything you think is good for my government. Only, my ignorance is fever; I share Nevil's.'

'Have you been to my desk at all?'

'No. I read your eyes and your hands: I have been living on them. To-day I find that I have not gained by it, as I hoped I should. Ignorance kills me. I really have courage to bear to hear—just at this moment I have.'

'There 's no bad news, my love,' said the earl.

'High fever, is it?'

'The usual fever. Gannet 's with him. I sent for Gannet to go there, to satisfy you.'

'Nevil is not dead?'

'Lord! ma'am, my dear soul!'

'He is alive?'

'Quite: certainly alive; as much alive as I am; only going a little faster, as fellows do in the jumps of a fever. The best doctor in England is by his bed. He 's doing fairly. You should have let me know you were fretting, my Rosamund.'

'I did not wish to tempt you to lie, my dear lord.'

'Well, there are times when a woman . . . as you are: but you 're a brave woman, a strong heart, and my wife. You want some one to sit with you, don't you? Louise Devereux is a pleasant person, but you want a man to amuse you. I 'd have sent to Stukely, but you want a serious man, I fancy.'

So much had the earl been thrown out of his plan for protecting his wife, that he felt helpless, and hinted at the aids and comforts of religion. He had not rejected the official Church, and regarding it now as in alliance with great Houses, he considered that its ministers might also be useful to the troubled women of noble families. He offered, if she pleased, to call in the rector to sit with her —the bishop of the diocese, if she liked.

'But just as you like, my love,' he added. 'You know you have to avoid fretting. I 've heard my sisters talk of

the parson doing them good off and on about the time of their being brought to bed. He elevated their minds, they said. I 'm sure I 've no objection. If he can doctor the minds of women he 's got a profession worth something.'

Rosamund smothered an outcry. 'You mean that Nevil is past hope!'

'Not if he's got a fair half of our blood in him. And Richard Beauchamp gave the fellow good stock. He has about the best blood in England. That 's not saying much when they 've taken to breed as they build—stuff to keep the plasterers at work; devil a thought of posterity!'

'There I see you and Nevil one, my dear lord,' said Rosamund. 'You think of those that are to follow us. Talk to me of him. Do not say, "the fellow." Say "Nevil." No, no; call him "the fellow." He was alive and well when you used to say it. But smile kindly, as if he made you love him down in your heart, in spite of you. We have both known that love, and that opposition to him; not liking his ideas, yet liking him so: we were obliged to laugh—I have seen you! as love does laugh! If I am not crying over his grave, Everard? Oh!'

The earl smoothed her forehead. All her suspicions were rekindled. 'Truth! truth! give me truth. Let me know what world I am in!'

'My dear, a ship 's not lost because she 's caught in a squall; nor a man buffeting the waves for an hour. He 's all right: he keeps up.'

'He is delirious? I ask you—I have fancied I heard him.'

Lord Romfrey puffed from his nostrils: but in affecting to blow to the winds her foolish woman's wildness of fancy, his mind rested on Nevil, and he said: 'Poor

boy! It seems he's chattering hundreds to the minute.'

His wife's looks alarmed him after he had said it, and he was for toning it and modifying it, when she gasped to him to help her to her feet; and standing up, she exclaimed: 'O heaven! now I hear *you*; now I know he lives. See how much better it is for me to know the real truth. It takes me to his bedside. Ignorance and suspense have been poison. I have been washed about like a dead body. Let me read all my letters now. Nothing will harm me now. You will do your best for me, my husband, will you not?' She tore at her dress at her throat for coolness, panting and smiling. 'For me—us—yours—ours! Give me my letters, lunch with me, and start for Bevisham. Now you see how good it is for me to hear the very truth, you will give me your own report, and I shall absolutely trust in it, and go down with it if it's false! But you see I am perfectly strong for the truth. It must be you or I to go. I burn to go; but your going will satisfy me. If *you* look on him, I look. I feel as if I had been nailed down in a coffin, and have got fresh air. I pledge you my word, sir, my honour, my dear husband, that I will think first of my duty. I know it would be Nevil's wish. He has not quite forgiven me—he thought me ambitious—ah! stop: he said that the birth of our child would give him greater happiness than he had known for years: he begged me to persuade you to call a boy Nevil Beauchamp, and a girl Renée. He has never believed in his own long living.'

Rosamund refreshed her lord's heart by smiling archly as she said: 'The boy to be *educated* to take the side of the people, of course! The girl is to learn a profession.'

'Ha! bless the fellow!' Lord Romfrey interjected. 'Well, I might go there for an hour. Promise me, no

fretting! You have hollows in your cheeks, and your underlip hangs: I don't like it. I haven't seen that before.'

'We do not see clearly when we are trying to deceive,' said Rosamund. 'My letters! my letters!'

Lord Romfrey went to fetch them. They were intact in his desk. His wife, then, had actually been reading the facts through a wall! For he was convinced of Mrs. Devereux's fidelity, as well as of the colonel's and Cecilia's. He was not a man to be disobeyed: nor was his wife the woman to court or to acquiesce in trifling acts of disobedience to him. He received the impression, consequently, that this matter of the visit to Nevil was one in which the poor loving soul might be allowed to guide him, singular as the intensity of her love of Nevil Beauchamp was, considering that they were not of kindred blood.

He endeavoured to tone her mind for the sadder items in Miss Denham's letters.

'Oh!' said Rosamund, 'what if I shed the "screaming eyedrops," as you call them? They will not hurt me, but relieve. I was sure I should some day envy that girl! If he dies she will have nursed him and had the last of him.'

'He 's not going to die!' said Everard powerfully.

'We must be prepared. These letters will do that for me. I have written out the hours of your trains. Stanton will attend on you. I have directed him to telegraph to the Dolphin in Bevisham for rooms for the night: that is to-morrow night. To-night you sleep at your hotel in London, which will be ready to receive you, and is more comfortable than the empty house. Stanton takes wine, madeira and claret, and other small necessaries. If Nevil should be *very* unwell, you will not leave him immediately. I shall look to the supplies. You will telegraph to me twice a day, and write once. We lunch at half-past

twelve, so that you may hit the twenty-minutes-to-two o'clock train. And now I go to see that the packing is done.'

She carried off her letters to her bedroom, where she fell upon the bed, shutting her eyelids hard before she could suffer her eyes to be the intermediaries of that fever-chamber in Bevisham and her bursting heart. But she had not positively deceived her husband in the re-assurance she had given him by her collectedness and by the precise directions she had issued for his comforts, indicating a mind so much more at ease. She was firmer to meet the peril of her beloved: and being indeed, when thrown on her internal resources, one among the brave women of earth, though also one who required a lift from circumstances to take her stand calmly fronting a menace to her heart, she saw the evidence of her influence with Lord Romfrey: the level she could feel that they were on together so long as she was courageous, inspirited her sovereignly.

He departed at the hour settled for him. Rosamund sat at her boudoir window, watching the carriage that was conducting him to the railway station. Neither of them had touched on the necessity of his presenting himself at the door of Dr. Shrapnel's house. That, and the disgust belonging to it, was a secondary consideration with Lord Romfrey, after he had once resolved on it as the right thing to do: and his wife admired and respected him for so supreme a loftiness. And fervently she prayed that it might not be her evil fate to disappoint his hopes. Never had she experienced so strong a sense of devotedness to him as when she saw the carriage winding past the middle oak-wood of the park, under a wet sky brightened from the West, and on out of sight.

CHAPTER L

AT THE COTTAGE ON THE COMMON

Rain went with Lord Romfrey in a pursuing cloud all the way to Bevisham, and across the common to the long garden and plain little green-shuttered, neat white cottage of Dr. Shrapnel. Carriages were driving from the door; idle men with hands deep in their pockets hung near it, some women pointing their shoulders under wet shawls, and boys. The earl was on foot. With no sign of discomposure, he stood at the half-open door and sent in his card, bearing the request for permission to visit his nephew. The reply failing to come to him immediately, he began striding to and fro. That garden gate where he had flourished the righteous whip was wide. Footfarers over the sodden common were attracted to the gateway, and lingered in it, looking at the long, green-extended windows, apparently listening, before they broke away to exchange undertone speech here and there. Boys had pushed up through the garden to the kitchen area. From time to time a woman in a dripping bonnet whimpered aloud.

An air of a country churchyard on a Sunday morning when the curate has commenced the service prevailed. The boys were subdued by the moisture, as they are when they sit in the church aisle or organ-loft, before their members have been much cramped.

The whole scene, and especially the behaviour of the boys, betokened to Lord Romfrey that an event had come to pass.

In the chronicle of a sickness the event is death.

He bethought him of various means of stopping the

telegraph and smothering the tale, if matters should have touched the worst here. He calculated abstrusely the practicable shortness of the two routes from Bevisham to Romfrey, by post-horses on the straightest line of road, or by express train on the triangle of railway, in case of an extreme need requiring him to hasten back to his wife and renew his paternal-despotic system with her. She had but persuaded him of the policy of a liberal openness and confidence for the moment's occasion: she could not turn his nature, which ran to strokes of craft and blunt decision whenever the emergency smote him and he felt himself hailed to show generalship.

While thus occupied in thoughtfulness he became aware of the monotony of a tuneless chant, as if, it struck him, an insane young chorister or canon were galloping straight on end hippomaniacally through the Psalms. There was a creak at intervals, leading him to think it a machine that might have run away with the winder's arm.

The earl's humour proposed the notion to him that this perhaps was one of the forms of Radical lamentation, ululation, possibly practised by a veteran impietist like Dr. Shrapnel for the loss of his youngster, his political cub—poor lad!

Deriding any such paganry, and aught that could be set howling, Lord Romfrey was presently moved to ask of the small crowd at the gate what that sound was.

'It 's the poor commander, sir,' said a wet-shawled woman, shivering.

'He 's been at it twenty hours already, sir,' said one of the boys.

'Twenty-foor hour he 've been at it,' said another.

A short dispute grew over the exact number of hours. One boy declared that thirty hours had been reached. 'Father heerd 'n yesterday morning as he was aff to 's

work in the town afore six: that brings 't nigh thirty: and he ha'n't stopped yet.'

The earl was invited to step inside the gate, a little way up to the house, and under the commander's window, that he might obtain a better hearing.

He swung round, walked away, walked back, and listened.

If it was indeed a voice, the voice, he would have said, was travelling high in air along the sky.

Yesterday he had described to his wife Nevil's chattering of hundreds to the minute. He had not realized the description, which had been only his manner of painting delirium: there had been no warrant for it. He heard the wild scudding voice imperfectly: it reminded him of a string of winter geese changeing waters. Shower gusts, and the wail and hiss of the rows of fir-trees bordering the garden, came between, and allowed him a moment's incredulity as to its being a human voice. Such a cry will often haunt the moors and wolds from above at nightfall. The voice hied on, sank, seemed swallowed; it rose, as if above water, in a hush of wind and trees. The trees bowed their heads rageing, the voice drowned; once more to rise, chattering thrice rapidly, in a high-pitched key, thin, shrill, weird, interminable, like winds through a crazy chamber-door at midnight.

The voice of a broomstick-witch in the clouds could not be thinner and stranger: Lord Romfrey had some such thought.

Dr. Gannet was the bearer of Miss Denham's excuses to Lord Romfrey for the delay in begging him to enter the house: in the confusion of the household his lordship's card had been laid on the table below, and she was in the sick-room.

'Is my nephew a dead man?' said the earl.

The doctor weighed his reply. 'He lives. Whether he

will, after the exhaustion of this prolonged fit of raving, I don't dare to predict. In the course of my experience I have never known anything like it. He lives: there 's the miracle, but he lives.'

'On brandy?'

'That would soon have sped him.'

'Ha. You have everything here that you want?'

'Everything.'

'He 's in your hands, Gannet.'

The earl was conducted to a sitting-room, where Dr. Gannet left him for a while.

Mindful that he was under the roof of his enemy, he remained standing, observing nothing.

The voice overheard was off at a prodigious rate, like the far sound of a yell ringing on and on.

The earl unconsciously sought a refuge from it by turning the leaves of a book upon the table, which was a complete edition of Harry Denham's Poems, with a preface by a man named Lydiard; and really, to read the preface one would suppose that these poets were the princes of the earth.

Lord Romfrey closed the volume. It was exquisitely bound, and presented to Miss Denham by the Mr. Lydiard. 'The works of your illustrious father,' was written on the title-page. These writers deal queerly with their words of praise of one another. There is no law to restrain them. Perhaps it is the consolation they take for the poor devil's life they lead!

A lady addressing him familiarly, invited him to go upstairs.

He thanked her. At the foot of the stairs he turned; he had recognized Cecilia Halkett.

Seeing her there was more strange to him than being there himself; but he bowed to facts.

'What do you think?' he said.

She did not answer intelligibly.

He walked up.

The crazed gabbling tongue had entire possession of the house, and rang through it at an amazing pitch to sustain for a single minute.

A reflection to the effect that dogs die more decently than we men, saddened the earl. But, then, it is true, we shorten their pangs by shooting them.

A dismal figure loomed above him at the head of the stairs.

He distinguished it in the vast lean length he had once whipped and flung to earth.

Dr. Shrapnel was planted against the wall outside that raving chamber, at the salient angle of a common prop or buttress. The edge of a shoulder and a heel were the supports to him sideways in his distorted attitude. His wall arm hung dead beside his pendent frock-coat; the hair of his head had gone to wildness, like a field of barley whipped by tempest. One hand pressed his eyeballs: his unshaven jaw dropped.

Lord Romfrey passed him by.

The dumb consent of all present affirmed the creature lying on the bed to be Nevil Beauchamp.

Face, voice, lank arms, chicken neck: what a sepulchral sketch of him!

It was the revelry of a corpse.

Shudders of alarm for his wife seized Lord Romfrey at the sight. He thought the poor thing on the bed must be going, resolving to a cry, unwinding itself violently in its hurricane of speech, that was not speech nor exclamation, rather the tongue let loose to run to the death. It seemed to be out in mid-sea, up wave and down wave.

A nurse was at the pillow smoothing it. Miss Denham stood at the foot of the bed.

'Is that pain?' Lord Romfrey said low to Dr. Gannet.

'Unconscious,' was the reply.

Miss Denham glided about the room and disappeared.

Her business was to remove Dr. Shrapnel, that he might be out of the way when Lord Romfrey should pass him again: but Dr. Shrapnel heard one voice only, and moaned, 'My Beauchamp!' She could not get him to stir.

Miss Denham saw him start slightly as the earl stepped forth and, bowing to him, said: 'I thank you, sir, for permitting me to visit my nephew.'

Dr. Shrapnel made a motion of the hand, to signify freedom of access to his house. He would have spoken: the effort fetched a burst of terrible chuckles. He covered his face.

Lord Romfrey descended. The silly old wretch had disturbed his equanimity as a composer of fiction for the comfort and sustainment of his wife: and no sooner had he the front door in view than the calculation of the three strides requisite to carry him out of the house plucked at his legs, much as young people are affected by a dancing measure; for he had, without deigning to think of matters disagreeable to him in doing so, performed the duty imposed upon him by his wife, and now it behoved him to ward off the coming blow from that double life at Romfrey Castle.

He was arrested in his hasty passage by Cecilia Halkett.

She handed him a telegraphic message: Rosamund requested him to stay two days in Bevisham. She said additionally: 'Perfectly well. Shall fear to see you returning yet. Have sent to Tourdestelle. All his friends. Ni espoir, ni crainte, mais point de déceptions. Lumière. Ce sont les ténèbres qui tuent.'

Her nimble wits had spied him on the road he was choosing, and outrun him.

He resigned himself to wait a couple of days at Bevisham. Cecilia begged him to accept a bed at Mount

Laurels. He declined, and asked her: 'How is it you are here?'

'I called here,' said she, compressing her eyelids in anguish at a wilder cry of the voice overhead, and forgetting to state why she had called at the house and what services she had undertaken. A heap of letters in her handwriting explained the nature of her task.

Lord Romfrey asked her where the colonel was.

'He drives me down in the morning and back at night, but they will give me a bed or a sofa here to-night—I can't . . .' Cecilia stretched her hand out, blinded, to the earl.

He squeezed her hand.

'These letters take away my strength: crying is quite useless, I know that,' said she, glancing at a pile of letters that she had partly replied to. 'Some are from people who can hardly write. There were people who distrusted him! Some are from people who abused him and maltreated him. See those poor creatures out in the rain!'

Lord Romfrey looked through the venetian blinds of the parlour window.

'It 's as good as a play to them,' he remarked.

Cecilia lit a candle and applied a stick of black wax to the flame, saying: 'Envelopes have fallen short. These letters will frighten the receivers. I cannot help it.'

'I will bring letter paper and envelopes in the afternoon,' said Lord Romfrey. 'Don't use black wax, my dear.'

'I can find no other: I do not like to trouble Miss Denham. Letter paper has to be sealed. These letters must go by the afternoon post: I do not like to rob the poor anxious people of a little hope while he lives. Let me have note paper and envelopes quickly: not black-edged.'

'Plain; that 's right,' said Lord Romfrey.

Black appeared to him like the torch of death flying over the country.

'There may be hope,' he added.

She sighed: 'Oh! yes.'

'Gannet will do everything that man can do to save him.'

'He will, I am sure.'

'You don't keep watch in the room, my dear, do you?'

'Miss Denham allows me an hour there in the day: it is the only rest she takes. She gives me her bedroom.'

'Ha: well: women!' ejaculated the earl, and paused. 'That sounded like him!'

'At times,' murmured Cecilia. 'All yesterday! all through the night! and to-day!'

'He 'll be missed.'

Any sudden light of happier expectation that might have animated him was extinguished by the flight of chatter following the cry which had sounded like Beauchamp.

He went out into the rain, thinking that Beauchamp would be missed. The fellow had bothered the world, but the world without him would be heavy matter.

The hour was mid-day, workmen's meal-time. A congregation of shipyard workmen and a multitude of children crowded near the door. In passing through them, Lord Romfrey was besought for the doctor's report of Commander Beauchamp, variously named Beesham, Bosham, Bitcham, Bewsham. The earl heard his own name pronounced as he particularly disliked to hear it—Rumfree. Two or three men scowled at him.

It had not occurred to him ever before in his meditations to separate his blood and race from the common English; and he was not of a character to dwell on fantastical and purposeless distinctions, but the mispronunciation of his name and his nephew's at an instant

when he was thinking of Nevil's laying down his life for such men as these gross excessive breeders, of ill shape and wooden countenance, pushed him to reflections on the madness of Nevil in endeavouring to lift them up and brush them up; and a curious tenderness for Nevil's madness worked in his breast as he contrasted this much-abused nephew of his with our general English—the so-called nobles, who were sunk in the mud of the traders: the traders, who were sinking in the mud of the workmen: the workmen, who were like harbour-flats at ebb tide round a stuck-fast fleet of vessels big and little.

Decidedly a fellow like Nevil would be missed by *him*!

These English, huddling more and more in flocks, turning to lumps, getting to be cut in a pattern and marked by a label—how they bark and snap to rend an obnoxious original! One may chafe at the botheration everlastingly raised by the fellow; but if our England is to keep her place she must have him, and many of him. Have him? He 's gone!

Lord Romfrey reasoned himself into pathetic sentiment by degrees.

He purchased the note paper and envelopes in the town for Cecilia. Late in the afternoon he deposited them on the parlour table at Dr. Shrapnel's. Miss Denham received him. She was about to lie down for her hour of rest on the sofa. Cecilia was upstairs. He inquired if there was any change in his nephew's condition.

'Not any,' said Miss Denham.

The voice was abroad for proof of that.

He stood with a swelling heart.

Jenny flung out a rug to its length beside the sofa, and, holding it by one end, said: 'I must have my rest, to be of service, my lord.'

He bowed. He was mute and surprised.

The young lady was like no person of her age and sex that he remembered ever to have met.

'I will close the door,' he said, retiring softly.

'Do not, my lord.'

The rug was over her, up to her throat, and her eyes were shut. He looked back through the doorway in going out. She was asleep.

'Some delirium. Gannet of good hope. All in the usual course'; he transmitted intelligence to his wife.

A strong desire for wine at his dinner-table warned him of something wrong with his iron nerves.

CHAPTER LI

IN THE NIGHT

THE delirious voice haunted him. It came no longer accompanied by images and likenesses to this and that of animate nature, which were relieving and distracting; it came to him in its mortal nakedness—an afflicting incessant ringing peal, bare as death's ribs in telling of death. When would it stop? And when it stopped, what would succeed? What ghastly silence!

He walked to within view of the lights of Dr. Shrapnel's at night: then home to his hotel.

Miss Denham's power of commanding sleep, as he could not, though contrary to custom he tried it on the right side and the left, set him thinking of her. He owned she was pretty. But that, he contended, was not the word; and the word was undiscoverable. Not Cecilia Halkett herself had so high-bred an air, for Cecilia had not her fineness of feature and full quick eyes, of which

the thin eyelids were part of the expression. And Cecilia sobbed, sniffled, was patched about the face, reddish, bluish. This girl was pliable only to service, not to grief: she did her work for three-and-twenty hours, and fell to her sleep of one hour like a soldier. Lord Romfrey could not recollect anything in a young woman that had taken him so much as the girl's tossing out of the rug and covering herself, lying down and going to sleep under his nose, absolutely independent of his presence.

She had not betrayed any woman's petulance with him for his conduct to her uncle or guardian. Nor had she hypocritically affected the reverse, as ductile women do, when they feel wanting in force to do the other. She was not unlike Nevil's marquise in face, he thought: less foreign of course; looking thrice as firm. Both were delicately featured.

He had a dream.

It was of an interminable procession of that odd lot called the People. All of them were quarrelling under a deluge. One party was for umbrellas, one was against them: and sounding the dispute with a question or two, Everard held it logical that there should be protection from the wet: just as logical on the other hand that so frail a shelter should be discarded, considering the tremendous downpour. But as he himself was dry, save for two or three drops, he deemed them all lunatics. He requested them to gag their empty chatter-boxes, and put the mother upon that child's cry.

He was now a simple unit of the procession. Asking naturally whither they were going, he saw them point. 'St. Paul's,' he heard. In his own bosom it was, and striking like the cathedral big bell.

Several ladies addressed him sorrowfully. He stood alone. It had become notorious that he was to do battle, and no one thought well of his chances. Devil an enemy

to be seen! he muttered. Yet they said the enemy was close upon him. His right arm was paralyzed. There was the enemy hard in front, mailed, vizored, gauntleted. He tried to lift his right hand, and found it grasping an iron ring at the bottom of the deep Steynham well, sunk one hundred feet through the chalk. But the unexampled cunning of his left arm was his little secret; and, acting upon this knowledge, he telegraphed to his first wife at Steynham that Dr. Gannet was of good hope, and thereupon he re-entered the ranks of the voluminous procession, already winding spirally round the dome of St. Paul's. And there, said he, is the tomb of Beauchamp. Everything occurred according to his predictions, and he was entirely devoid of astonishment. Yet he would fain have known the titles of the slain admiral's naval battles. He protested he had a right to know, for he was the hero's uncle, and loved him. He assured the stupid scowling people that he loved Nevil Beauchamp, always loved the boy, and was the staunchest friend the fellow had. And saying that, he certainly felt himself leaning up against the cathedral rails in the attitude of Dr. Shrapnel, and crying, 'Beauchamp! Beauchamp!' And then he walked firmly out of Romfrey oak-woods, and, at a mile's distance from her, related to his countess Rosamund that the burial was over without much silly ceremony, and that she needed to know nothing of it whatever.

Rosamund's face awoke him. It was the face of a chalk-quarry, featureless, hollowed, appalling.

The hour was no later than three in the morning. He quitted the detestable bed where a dream—one of some half-dozen in the course of his life—had befallen him. For the maxim of the healthy man is: up, and have it out in exercise when sleep is for foisting base coin of dreams upon you! And as the healthy only are fit to live, their maxims should be law. He dressed and

directed his leisurely steps to the common, under a black sky, and stars of lively brilliancy. The lights of a carriage gleamed on Dr. Shrapnel's door. A footman informed Lord Romfrey that Colonel Halkett was in the house, and soon afterward the colonel appeared.

'Is it over? I don't hear him,' said Lord Romfrey.

Colonel Halkett grasped his hand. 'Not yet,' he said. 'Cissy can't be got away. It 's killing her. No, he 's alive. You may hear him now.'

Lord Romfrey bent his ear.

'It 's weaker,' the colonel resumed. 'By the way, Romfrey, step out with me. My dear friend, the circumstances will excuse me: you know I 'm not a man to take liberties. I 'm bound to tell you what your wife writes to me. She says she has it on her conscience, and can't rest for it. You know women. She wants you to speak to the man here—Shrapnel. She wants Nevil to hear that you and he were friendly before he dies; thinks it would console the poor dear fellow. That 's only an idea; but it concerns her, you see. I 'm shocked to have to talk to you about it.'

'My dear colonel, I have no feeling against the man,' Lord Romfrey replied. 'I spoke to him whem I saw him yesterday. I bear no grudges. Where is he? You can send to her to say I have spoken to him twice.'

'Yes, yes,' the colonel assented.

He could not imagine that Lady Romfrey required more of her husband. 'Well, I must be off. I leave Blackburn Tuckham here, with a friend of his; a man who seems to be very sweet with Mrs. Wardour-Devereux.'

'Ha! Fetch him to me, colonel; I beg you to do that,' said Lord Romfrey.

The colonel brought out Lydiard to the earl.

'You have been at my nephew's bedside, Mr. Lydiard?'

'Within ten minutes, my lord.'

'What is your opinion of the case?'

'My opinion is, the chances are in his favour.'

'Lay me under obligation by communicating that to Romfrey Castle at the first opening of the telegraph office to-morrow morning.'

Lydiard promised.

'The raving has ended?'

'Hardly, sir, but the exhaustion is less than we feared it would be.'

'Gannet is there?'

'He is in an arm-chair in the room.'

'And Dr. Shrapnel?'

'He does not bear speaking to; he is quiet.'

'He is attached to my nephew?'

'As much as to life itself.'

Lord Romfrey thanked Lydiard courteously. 'Let us hope, sir, that some day I shall have the pleasure of entertaining you, as well as another friend of yours.'

'You are very kind, my lord.'

The earl stood at the door to see Colonel Halkett drive off: he declined to accompany him to Mount Laurels.

In the place of the carriage stood a man, who growled: 'Where 's your horsewhip, butcher?'

He dogged the earl some steps across the common. Everard returned to his hotel and slept soundly during the remainder of the dark hours.

CHAPTER LII

QUESTION OF A PILGRIMAGE AND AN ACT OF PENANCE

Then came a glorious morning for sportsmen. One sniffed the dews, and could fancy fresh smells of stubble earth and dank woodland grass in the very streets of dirty

Bevisham. Sound sleep, like hearty dining, endows men with a sense of rectitude, and sunlight following the former, as a pleasant spell of conversational ease or sweet music the latter, smiles a celestial approval of the performance. Lord Romfrey dismissed his anxieties. His lady slightly ruffled him at breakfast in a letter saying that she wished to join him. He was annoyed at noon by a message, wherein the wish was put as a request. And later arrived another message, bearing the character of an urgent petition. True, it might be laid to the account of telegraphic brevity.

He saw Dr. Shrapnel, and spoke to him, as before, to thank him for the permission to visit his nephew. Nevil he contemplated for the space of five minutes. He cordially saluted Miss Denham. He kissed Cecilia's hand.

''All here is going on so well that I am with you for a day or two to-morrow,' he despatched the message to his wife.

Her case was now the gravest. He could not understand why she desired to be in Bevisham. She must have had execrable dreams!—rank poison to mothers.

However, her constitutional strength was great, and his pride in the restoration of his House by her agency flourished anew, what with fair weather and a favourable report from Dr. Gannet. The weather was most propitious to the hopes of any soul bent on dispersing the shadows of death, and to sportsmen. From the windows of his railway carriage he beheld the happy sportsmen stalking afield. The birds whirred and dropped just where he counted on their dropping. The smoke of the guns threaded to dazzling silver in the sunshine. Say what poor old Nevil will, or *did* say, previous to the sobering of his blood, where is there a land like England? Everard

rejoiced in his country temperately. Having Nevil as well,—of which fact the report he was framing in his mind to deliver to his wife assured him—he was rich. And you that put yourselves forward for republicans and democrats, do you deny the aristocracy of an oaklike man who is young upon the verge of eighty?

These were poetic flights, but he knew them not by name, and had not to be ashamed of them.

Rosamund met him in the hall of the castle. 'You have not deceived me, my dear lord,' she said, embracing him. 'You have done what you could for me. The rest is for me to do.'

He reciprocated her embrace warmly, in commendation of her fresher good looks.

She asked him, 'You have spoken to Dr. Shrapnel?'

He answered her, 'Twice.'

The word seemed quaint. She recollected that he was quaint.

He repeated, 'I spoke to him the first day I saw him, and the second.'

'We are so much indebted to him,' said Rosamund. 'His love of Nevil surpasses ours. Poor man! poor man! At least we may now hope the blow will be spared him which would have carried off his life with Nevil's. I have later news of Nevil than you.'

'Good, of course?'

'Ah me! the pleasure of the absence of pain. He is not gone.'

Lord Romfrey liked her calm resignation.

'There 's a Mr. Lydiard,' he said, 'a friend of Nevil's, and a friend of Louise Devereux's.'

'Yes; we hear from him every four hours,' Rosamund rejoined. 'Mention him to her before me.'

'That 's exactly what I was going to tell you to do before me,' said her husband, smiling.

'Because, Everard, is it not so?—widows . . . and she loves this gentleman!'

'Certainly, my dear; I think with you about widows. The world asks them to practise its own hypocrisy. Louise Devereux was married to a pipe; she 's the widow of tobacco ash. We 'll make daylight round her.'

'How good, how kind you are, my lord! I did not think so shrewd! But benevolence is almost all-seeing. You said you spoke to Dr. Shrapnel twice. Was he . . . polite?'

'Thoroughly upset, you know.'

'What did he say?'

'What was it? "Beauchamp! Beauchamp!" the first time; and the second time he said he thought it had left off raining.'

'Ah!' Rosamund drooped her head.

She looked up. 'Here is Louise. My lord has had a long conversation with Mr. Lydiard.'

'I trust he will come here before you leave us,' added the earl.

Rosamund took her hand. 'My lord has been more acute than I, or else your friend is less guarded than you.'

'What have you seen?' said the blushing lady.

'Stay. I have an idea you are one of the women I promised to Cecil Baskelett,' said the earl. 'Now may I tell him there 's *no* chance?'

'Oh! do.'

They spent so very pleasant an evening that the earl settled down into a comfortable expectation of the renewal of his old habits in the September and October season. Nevil's frightful cry played on his ear-drum at whiles, but not too affectingly. He conducted Rosamund to her room, kissed her, hoped she would sleep well, and

retired to his good hard bachelor's bed, where he confidently supposed he would sleep. The sleep of a dyspeptic, with a wilder than the monstrous Bevisham dream, befell him, causing him to rise at three in the morning and proceed to his lady's chamber, to assure himself that at least she slept well. She was awake.

'I thought you might come,' she said.

He reproached her gently for indulging foolish nervous fears.

She replied, 'No, I do not; I am easier about Nevil. I begin to think he will live. I have something at my heart that prevents me from sleeping. It concerns me. Whether he is to live or die, I should like him to know he has not striven in vain—not in everything: not where my conscience tells me he was right, and we, I, wrong—utterly wrong, wickedly wrong.'

'My dear girl, you are exciting yourself.'

'No; feel my pulse. The dead of night brings out Nevil to me like the Writing on the Wall. It shall not be said he failed in everything. Shame to us if it could be said! He tried to make me see what my duty was, and my honour.'

'He was at every man Jack of us.'

'I speak of one thing. I thought I might not have to go. Now I feel I must. I remember him at Steynham, when Colonel Halkett and Cecilia were there. But for me, Cecilia would now be his wife. Of that there is no doubt; that is not the point; regrets are fruitless. I see how the struggle it cost him to break with his old love —that endearing Madame de Rouaillout, his Renée—broke his heart; and then his loss of Cecilia Halkett. But I do believe, true as that I am lying here, and you hold my hand, my dear husband, those losses were not so fatal to him as his sufferings he went through on account of his friend Dr. Shrapnel. I will not keep you here.

Go and have some rest. What I shall beg of you to-morrow will not injure my health in the slightest: the reverse: it will raise me from a bitter depression. It shall not be said that those who loved him were unmoved by him. Before he comes back to life, or is carried to his grave, he shall know that I was not false to my love of him.'

'My dear, your pulse is at ninety,' said the earl.

'Look lenient, be kind, be just, my husband. Oh! let us cleanse our hearts. This great wrong was my doing. I am not only quite strong enough to travel to Bevisham, I shall be happy in going: and when I have done it —said: "The wrong was all mine," I shall rejoice like the pure in spirit. Forgiveness does not matter, though I now believe that poor loving old man who waits outside his door weeping, is wrong-headed only in his political views. We women can read men by their power to love. Where love exists there is goodness. But it is not for the sake of the poor old man himself that I would go: it is for Nevil's: it is for ours, chiefly for me, for my child's, if ever . . . !' Rosamund turned her head on her pillow.

The earl patted her cheek. 'We 'll talk it over in the morning,' he said. 'Now go to sleep.'

He could not say more, for he did not dare to attempt cajolery with her. Shading his lamp he stepped softly away to wrestle with a worse nightmare than sleep's. Her meaning was clear: and she was a woman to insist on doing it. She was nevertheless a woman not impervious to reason, if only he could shape her understanding to perceive that the state of her nerves, incident to her delicate situation and the shock of that fellow Nevil's illness—poor lad!—was acting on her mind, rendering her a victim of exaggerated ideas of duty, and so forth.

Naturally, apart from allowing her to undertake the journey by rail, he could not sanction his lady's humbling

of herself so egregiously and unnecessarily. Shrapnel had behaved unbecomingly, and had been punished for it. He had spoken to Shrapnel, and the affair was virtually at an end. With his assistance she would see that, when less excited. Her eternal brooding over Nevil was the cause of these mental vagaries.

Lord Romfrey was for postponing the appointed discussion in the morning after breakfast. He pleaded business engagements.

'None so urgent as this of mine,' said Rosamund.

'But we have excellent news of Nevil: you have Gannet's word for it,' he argued. 'There 's really nothing to distress you.'

'My heart: I must be worthy of good news, to know happiness,' she answered. 'I will say, let me go to Bevisham two, three, four days hence, if you like, but there is peace for me, and nowhere else.'

'My precious Rosamund! have you set your two eyes on it? What you are asking, is for permission to make an *apology* to Shrapnel!'

'That is the word.'

'That 's Nevil's word.'

'It is a prescription to me.'

'An apology?'

The earl's gorge rose. Why, such an act was comparable to the circular mission of the dog!

'If I do not make the apology, the mother of your child is a coward,' said Rosamund.

'She 's not.'

'I trust not.'

'You are a reasonable woman, my dear. Now listen: the man insulted you. It 's past: done with. He insulted you . . .'

'He did not.'

'What?'

'He was courteous to me, hospitable to me, kind to me. He did not insult me. I belied him.'

'My dear saint, you 're dreaming. He spoke insultingly of you to Cecil.'

'Is my lord that man's dupe? I would stand against him before the throne of God, with what little I know of his interview with Dr. Shrapnel, to confront him and expose his lie. Do not speak of him. He stirs my evil passions, and makes me feel myself the creature I was when I returned to Steynham from my first visit to Bevisham, enraged with jealousy of Dr. Shrapnel's influence over Nevil, spiteful, malicious: Oh! such a nest of vileness as I pray to heaven I am not now, if it is granted me to give life to another. Nevil's misfortunes date from that,' she continued, in reply to the earl's efforts to soothe her. 'Not the loss of the Election: that was no misfortune, but a lesson. He would not have shone in Parliament: he runs too much from first principles to extremes. You see I am perfectly reasonable, Everard: I can form an exact estimate of character and things.' She smiled in his face. 'And I know my husband too: what he will grant; what he would not, and justly would not. I know to a certainty that vexatious as I must be to you now, you are conscious of my having reason for being so.'

'You carry it so far—fifty miles beyond the mark,' said he. 'The man roughed you, and I taught him manners.'

'No!' she half screamed her interposition. 'I repeat, he was in no way discourteous or disobliging to me. He offered me a seat at his table, and, heaven forgive me! I believe a bed in his house, that I might wait and be sure of seeing Nevil, because I was very anxious to see him.'

'All the same, you can't go to the man.'

'I should have said so too, before my destiny touched me.'

'A certain dignity of position, my dear, demands a corresponding dignity of conduct: you can't go.'

'If I am walking in the very eye of heaven, and feeling it shining on me where I go, there is no question for me of human dignity.'

Such flighty talk offended Lord Romfrey.

'It comes to this: you 're in want of a parson.'

Rosamund was too careful to hint that she would have expected succour and seconding from one or other of the better order of clergymen.

She shook her head. 'To this, my dear lord: I have a troubled mind; and it is not to listen nor to talk, that I am in need of, but to act.'

'Yes, my dear girl, but not to act insanely. I do love soundness of head. You have it, only just now you 're a little astray. We 'll leave this matter for another time.'

Rosamund held him by the arm. 'Not too long!'

Both of them applied privately to Mrs. Wardour-Devereux for her opinion and counsel on the subject of the proposal to apologize to Dr. Shrapnel. She was against it with the earl, and became Rosamund's echo when with her. When alone, she was divided into two almost equal halves: deeming that the countess should not insist, and the earl should not refuse: him she condemned for lack of sufficient spiritual insight to perceive the merits of his wife's request: her she accused of some vestige of something underbred in her nature, for putting such fervid stress upon the supplication: *i.e.* making too much of it—a trick of the vulgar: and not known to the languid.

She wrote to Lydiard for advice.

He condensed a paragraph into a line:

'It should be the earl. She is driving him to it, intentionally or not.'

Mrs. Devereux doubted that the countess could have so false an idea of her husband's character as to think it possible he would ever be bent to humble himself to the man he had castigated. She was right. It was by honestly presenting to his mind something more loathsome still, the humbling of herself, that Rosamund succeeded in awakening some remote thoughts of a compromise, in case of necessity. Better I than she!

But the necessity was inconceivable.

He had really done everything required of him, if anything was really required, by speaking to Shrapnel civilly. He had spoken to Shrapnel twice.

Besides, the castle was being gladdened by happier tidings of Beauchamp. Gannet now pledged his word to the poor fellow's recovery, and the earl's particular friends arrived, and the countess entertained them. October passed smoothly.

She said once: 'Ancestresses of yours, my lord, have undertaken pilgrimages as acts of penance for sin, to obtain heaven's intercession in their extremity.'

'I dare say they did,' he replied. 'The monks got round them.'

'It is not to be laughed at, if it eased their hearts.'

Timidly she renewed her request for permission to perform the pilgrimage to Bevisham.

'Wait,' said he, 'till Nevil is on his legs.'

'Have you considered where I may then be, Everard?'

'My love, you sleep well, don't you?'

'You see me every night.'

'I see you sound asleep.'

'I see you watching me.'

'Let 's reason,' said the earl; and again they went through the argument upon the apology to Dr. Shrapnel.

He was willing to indulge her in any amount of it: and she perceived why. Fox! she thought. Grand fox, but fox downright. For her time was shortening to days that would leave her no free-will.

On the other hand, the exercise of her free-will in a fast resolve, was growing all the more a privilege that he was bound to respect. As she became sacreder and doubly precious to him, the less would he venture to thwart her, though he should think her mad. There would be an analogy between his manner of regarding her and the way that superstitious villagers look on their crazy innocents, she thought sadly. And she bled for him too: she grieved to hurt his pride. But she had come to imagine that there was no avoidance of this deed of personal humiliation.

Nevil had scrawled a note to her. She had it in her hand one forenoon in mid November, when she said to her husband: 'I have ordered the carriage for two o'clock to meet the quarter to three train to London, and I have sent Stanton on to get the house ready for us to-night.'

Lord Romfrey levelled a marksman's eye at her.

'Why London? You know my wish that it should be here at the castle.'

'I have decided to go to Bevisham. I have little time left.'

'None, to my thinking.'

'Oh! yes; my heart will be light. I shall gain. You come with me to London?'

'You can't go.'

'Don't attempt to reason with me, please, please!'

'I command, madam.'

'My lord, it is past the hour of commanding.'

He nodded his head, with the eyes up amid the puckered brows, and blowing one of his long nasal expirations, cried, 'Here we are, in for another bout of argument!'

'No; I can bear the journey, rejoice in confessing my fault, but more argument I cannot bear. I will reason with you when I can: submit to me in this.'

'Feminine reasoning!' he interjected.

'I have nothing better to offer. It will be prudent to attend to me. Take my conduct for the portion I bring you. Before I put myself in God's care I must be clean. I am unclean. Language like that offends you. I have no better. My reasoning has not touched you; I am helpless, except in this determination that my contrition shall be expressed to Dr. Shrapnel. If I am to have life, to be worthy of living and being a mother, it must be done. Now, my dear lord, see that, and submit. You 're but one voice: I am two.'

He jumped off his chair, frowning up his forehead, and staring awfully at the insulting prospect. 'An apology to the man? By you? Away with it.'

'Make allowances for me if you can, my dear lord: that is what I am going to do.'

'My wife going there?' He strode along furiously. 'No!'

'You will not stop her.'

'There 's a palsy in my arm if I don't.'

She plucked at her watch.

'Why, ma'am, I don't know you,' he said, coming close to her. 'Let 's reason. Perhaps you overshot it; you were disgusted with Shrapnel. Perhaps I was hasty; I get fired by an insult to a woman. There was a rascal kissed a girl once against her will, and I heard her cry out; I laid him on his back for six months;—just to tell

you; I'd do the same to lord or beggar. Very well, my dear heart, we 'll own I might have looked into the case when that dog Cecil . . . what 's the matter?'

'Speak on, my dear husband,' said Rosamund, panting.

'But your making the journey to Bevisham is a foolish notion.'

'Yes? well?'

'Well, we 'll wait.'

'Oh! have we to travel over it all again?' she exclaimed in despair at the dashing out of a light she had fancied. 'You see the wrong. You know the fever it is in my blood, and you bid me wait.'

'Drop a line to Nevil.'

'To trick my conscience! I might have done that, and done well, once. Do you think I dislike the task I propose to myself? It is for your sake that I would shun it. As for me, the thought of going there is an ecstasy. I shall be with Nevil, and be able to look in his face. And how can I be actually abasing you when I am so certain that I am worthier of you in what I do?'

Her exaltation swept her on. 'Hurry there, my lord, if you will. If you think it prudent that you should go in my place, go: you deprive me of a great joy, but I will not put myself in your way, and I consent. The chief sin was mine; remember that. I rank it viler than Cecil Baskelett's. And listen: *when*—can you reckon? —when will *he* confess his wickedness? We separate ourselves from a wretch like that.'

'Pooh,' quoth the earl.

'But you will go?' She fastened her arms round the arm nearest: 'You or I! Does it matter which? We are one. You speak for me; I should have been forced to speak for you. You spare me the journey. I do not in truth suppose it would have injured me; but I would not run one unnecessary risk.'

Lord Romfrey sighed profoundly. He could not shake her off. How could he refuse her?

How on earth had it come about that suddenly he was expected to be the person to go?

She would not let him elude her; and her stained cheeks and her trembling on his arm pleaded most pressingly and masteringly. It might be that she spoke with a knowledge of her case. Positive it undoubtedly was that she meant to go if he did not. Perhaps the hopes of his House hung on it. Having admitted that a wrong had been done, he was not the man to leave it unamended; only he would have chosen his time, and the manner. Since Nevil's illness, too, he had once or twice been clouded with a little bit of regret at the recollection of poor innocent old Shrapnel posted like a figure of total inebriation beside the doorway of the dreadful sick-room.

There had been women of the earl's illustrious House who would have given their hands to the axe rather than conceal a stain and have to dread a scandal. His Rosamund, after all, was of their pattern; even though she blew that conscience she prattled of into trifles, and swelled them, as women of high birth in this country, out of the clutches of the priests, do not do.

She clung to him for his promise to go.

He said: 'Well, well.'

'That means, you will,' said she.

His not denying it passed for the affirmative.

Then indeed she bloomed with love of him.

'Yet do say yes,' she begged.

'I 'll go, ma'am,' shouted the earl. 'I 'll go, my love,' he said softly.

CHAPTER LIII

THE APOLOGY TO DR. SHRAPNEL

'You and Nevil are so alike,' Lady Romfrey said to her lord, at some secret resemblance she detected and dwelt on fondly, when the earl was on the point of starting a second time for Bevisham to perform what she had prompted him to conceive his honourable duty, without a single intimation that he loathed the task, neither shrug nor grimace.

'Two ends of a stick are pretty much alike: they 're all that length apart,' said he, very little in the humour for compliments, however well braced for his work.

His wife's admiring love was pleasant enough. He preferred to have it unspoken. Few of us care to be eulogized in the act of taking a nauseous medical mixture.

For him the thing was as good as done, on his deciding to think it both adviseable and right: so he shouldered his load and marched off with it. He could have postponed the right proceeding, even after the partial recognition of his error:—one drops a word or two by hazard, one expresses an anxiety to afford reparation, one sends a message, and so forth, for the satisfaction of one's conventionally gentlemanly feeling:—but the adviseable proceeding under stress of peculiar circumstances, his clearly-awakened recognition of that, impelled him unhesitatingly. His wife had said it was the portion she brought him. Tears would not have persuaded him so powerfully, that he might prove to her he was glad of her whatever the portion she brought. She was a good wife, a brave woman, likely to be an incomparable mother. At present her very virtues excited her to fancifulness:

nevertheless she was in his charge, and he was bound to break the neck of his will, to give her perfect peace of mind. The child suffers from the mother's mental agitation. It might be a question of a nervous or an idiot future Earl of Romfrey. Better death to the House than such a mockery of his line! These reflections reminded him of the heartiness of his whipping of that poor old tumbled signpost Shrapnel, in the name of outraged womankind. If there was no outrage?

Assuredly if there was no outrage, consideration for the state of his wife would urge him to speak the apology in the most natural manner possible. She vowed there was none.

He never thought of blaming her for formerly deceiving him, nor of blaming her for now expediting him.

In the presence of Colonel Halkett, Mr. Tuckham, and Mr. Lydiard, on a fine November afternoon, standing bareheaded in the fir-bordered garden of the cottage on the common, Lord Romfrey delivered his apology to Dr. Shrapnel, and he said:

'I call you to witness, gentlemen, I offer Dr. Shrapnel the fullest reparation he may think fit to demand of me for an unprovoked assault on him, that I find was quite unjustified, and for which I am here to ask his forgiveness.'

Speech of man could not have been more nobly uttered.

Dr. Shrapnel replied:

'To the half of that, sir—'tis over! What remains is done with the hand.'

He stretched his hand out.

Lord Romfrey closed his own on it.

The antagonists, between whom was no pretence of their being other after the performance of a creditable ceremony, bowed and exchanged civil remarks: and then Lord Romfrey was invited to go into the house and see Beauchamp, who happened to be sitting with Cecilia Halkett

and Jenny Denham. Beauchamp was thin, pale, and quiet; but the sight of him standing and conversing after that scene of the skinny creature struggling with bare-ribbed obstruction on the bed, was an example of constitutional vigour and a compliment to the family very gratifying to Lord Romfrey. Excepting by Cecilia, the earl was coldly received. He had to leave early by special express for London to catch the last train to Romfrey. Beauchamp declined to fix a day for his visit to the castle with Lydiard, but proposed that Lydiard should accompany the earl on his return. Lydiard was called in, and at once accepted the earl's invitation, and quitted the room to pack his portmanteau.

A faint sign of firm-shutting shadowed the corners of Jenny's lips.

'You have brought my nephew to life,' Lord Romfrey said to her.

'My share in it was very small, my lord.'

'Gannet says that your share in it was very great.'

'And I say so, with the authority of a witness,' added Cecilia.

'And I, from my experience,' came from Beauchamp.

His voice had a hollow sound, unlike his natural voice.

The earl looked at him remembering the bright laughing lad he had once been, and said: 'Why not try a month of Madeira? You have only to step on board the boat.'

'I don't want to lose a month of my friend,' said Beauchamp.

'Take your friend with you. After these fevers our Winters are bad.'

'I 've been idle too long.'

'But, Captain Beauchamp,' said Jenny, 'you proposed to do nothing but read for a couple of years.'

'Ay, there 's the voyage!' sighed he, with a sailor-invalid's vision of sunny seas dancing in the far sky.

'You must persuade Dr. Shrapnel to come; and he will not come unless you come too, and you won't go anywhere but to the Alps!'

She bent her eyes on the floor. Beauchamp remembered what had brought her home from the Alps. He cast a cold look on his uncle talking with Cecilia: granite, as he thought. And the reflux of that slight feeling of despair seemed to tear down with it in wreckage every effort he had made in life, and cry failure on him. Yet he was hoping that he had not been created for failure.

He touched his uncle's hand indifferently: 'My love to the countess: let me hear of her, sir, if you please.'

'You shall,' said the earl. 'But, off to Madeira, and up Teneriffe: sail the Azores. I 'll hire you a good-sized schooner.'

'There is the Esperanza,' said Cecilia. 'And the vessel is lying *idle*, Nevil! Can you allow it?'

He consented to laugh at himself, and fell to coughing.

Jenny Denham saw a real human expression of anxiety cross the features of the earl at the sound of the cough.

Lord Romfrey said 'Adieu,' to her.

He offered her his hand, which she contrived to avoid taking by dropping a formal half-reverence.

'Think of the Esperanza; she will be coasting her nominal native land! and adieu for to-day,' Cecilia said to Beauchamp.

Jenny Denham and he stood at the window to watch the leave-taking in the garden, for a distraction. They interchanged no remark of surprise at seeing the earl and Dr. Shrapnel hand-locked: but Jenny's heart reproached her uncle for being actually servile, and Beauchamp accused the earl of aristocratic impudence.

Both were overcome with remorse when Colonel Halkett, putting his head into the room to say good-bye to Beauchamp and place the Esperanza at his disposal for a

Winter cruise, chanced to mention in two or three half words the purpose of the earl's visit, and what had occurred. He took it for known already.

To Miss Denham he remarked: 'Lord Romfrey is very much concerned about your health; he fears you have overdone it in nursing Captain Beauchamp.'

'I must be off after him,' said Beauchamp, and began trembling so that he could not stir.

The colonel knew the pain and shame of that condition of weakness to a man who has been strong and swift, and said: 'Seven-league boots are not to be caught. You 'll see him soon. Why, I thought some letter of yours had fetched him here! I gave you all the credit of it.'

'No, he deserves it all himself—all,' said Beauchamp: and with a dubious eye on Jenny Denham: 'You see, we were unfair.'

The 'we' meant 'you' to her sensitiveness; and probably he did mean it for 'you': for as he would have felt, so he supposed that his uncle must have felt, Jenny's coldness was much the crueller. Her features, which in animation were summer light playing upon smooth water, could be exceedingly cold in repose: the icier to those who knew her, because they never expressed disdain. No expression of the baser sort belonged to them. Beauchamp was intimate with these delicately-cut features; he would have shuddered had they chilled on him. He had fallen in love with his uncle; he fancied she ought to have done so too; and from his excess of sympathy he found her deficient in it.

He sat himself down to write a hearty letter to his 'dear old uncle Everard.'

Jenny left him, to go to her chamber and cry.

CHAPTER LIV

THE FRUITS OF THE APOLOGY

This clear heart had cause for tears. Her just indignation with Lord Romfrey had sustained her artificially hitherto: now that it was erased, she sank down to weep. Her sentiments toward Lydiard had been very like Cecilia Halkett's in favour of Mr. Austin; with something more to warm them on the part of the gentleman. He first had led her mind in the direction of balanced thought, when, despite her affection for Dr. Shrapnel, her timorous maiden wits, unable to contend with the copious exclamatory old politician, opposed him silently. Lydiard had helped her tongue to speak, as well as her mind to rational views; and there had been a bond of union in common for them in his admiration of her father's writings. She had known that he was miserably yoked, and had respected him when he seemed inclined for compassion without wooing her for tenderness. He had not trifled with her, hardly flattered; he had done no more than kindle a young girl's imaginative liking. The pale flower of imagination, fed by dews, not by sunshine, was born drooping, and hung secret in her bosom, shy as a bell of the frail wood-sorrel. Yet there was pain for her in the perishing of a thing so poor and lowly. She had not observed the change in Lydiard after Beauchamp came on the scene: and that may tell us how passionlessly pure the little maidenly sentiment was. For do but look on the dewy wood-sorrel flower; it is not violet or rose inviting hands to pluck it: still it is there, happy in the woods. And Jenny's feeling was that a foot had crushed it.

She wept, thinking confusedly of Lord Romfrey; trying to think he had made his amends tardily, and that Beauchamp prized him too highly for the act. She had no longer anything to resent: she was obliged to weep. In truth, as the earl had noticed, she was physically depressed by the strain of her protracted watch over Beauchamp, as well as rather heartsick.

But she had been of aid and use in saving him! She was not quite a valueless person; sweet, too, was the thought that he consulted her, listened to her, weighed her ideas. He had evidently taken to study her, as if dispersing some wonderment that one of her sex should have ideas. He had repeated certain of her own which had been forgotten by her. His eyes were often on her with this that she thought humorous intentness. She smiled. She had assisted in raising him from his bed of sickness, whereof the memory affrighted her and melted her. The difficulty now was to keep him indoors, and why he would not go even temporarily to a large house like Mount Laurels, whither Colonel Halkett was daily requesting him to go, she was unable to comprehend. His love of Dr. Shrapnel might account for it.

'Own, Jenny,' said Beauchamp, springing up to meet her as she entered the room where he and Dr. Shrapnel sat discussing Lord Romfrey's bearing at his visit, 'own that my uncle Everard is a true nobleman. He has to make the round to the right mark, but he comes to it. *I* could not move him—and I like him the better for that. He worked round to it himself. I ought to have been sure he would. You 're right: I break my head with impatience.'

'No; you sowed seed,' said Dr. Shrapnel. 'Heed not that girl, my Beauchamp. The old woman 's in the Tory, and the Tory leads the young maid. Here 's a fable I draw from a Naturalist's book, and we 'll set it against

the dicta of Jenny Donothing, Jenny Discretion, Jenny Wait-for-the-Gods:—Once upon a time in a tropical island a man lay sick; so ill that he could not rise to trouble his neighbours for help; so weak that it was lifting a mountain to get up from his bed; so hopeless of succour that the last spark of distraught wisdom perching on his brains advised him to lie where he was and trouble not himself, since peace at least he could command, before he passed upon the black highroad men call our kingdom of peace: ay, he lay there. Now it chanced that this man had a mess to cook for his nourishment. And life said, Do it, and death said, To what end? He wrestled with the stark limbs of death, and cooked the mess; and that done he had no strength remaining to him to consume it, but crept to his bed like the toad into winter. Now, meanwhile a steam arose from the mess, and he lay stretched. So it befel that the birds of prey of the region scented the mess, and they descended and thronged at that man's windows. And the man's neighbours looked up at them, for it was the sign of one who is fit for the beaks of birds, lying unburied. Fail to spread the pall one hour where suns are decisive, and the pall comes down out of heaven! They said, The man is dead within. And they went to his room, and saw him and succoured him. They lifted him out of death by the last uncut thread.

'Now, my Jenny Weigh-words, Jenny Halt-there! was it they who saved the man, or he that saved himself? The man taxed his expiring breath to sow seed of life. Lydiard shall put it into verse for a fable in song for our people. I say it is a good fable, and sung spiritedly may serve for nourishment, and faith in work, to many of our poor fainting fellows! Now you?'

Jenny said: 'I think it is a good fable of self-help. Does it quite illustrate the case? I mean, the virtue of

impatience. But I like the fable and the moral; and I think it would do good if it were made popular, though it would be hard to condense it to a song.'

'It would be hard! ay, then we do it forthwith. And you shall compose the music. As for the "case of impatience," my dear, you tether the soaring universal to your pet-lamb's post, the special. I spoke of seed sown. I spoke of the fruits of energy and resolution. Cared I for an apology? I took the blows as I take hail from the clouds—which apologize to you the moment you are in shelter, if you laugh at them. So, good night to that matter! Are we to have rain this evening? I must away into Bevisham to the Workmen's Hall, and pay the men.'

'There will not be rain; there will be frost, and you must be well wrapped if you must go,' said Jenny. 'And tell them not to think of deputations to Captain Beauchamp yet.'

'No, no deputations; let them send Killick, if they want to say anything,' said Beauchamp.

'Wrong!' the doctor cried; 'wrong! wrong! Six men won't hurt you more than one. And why check them when their feelings are up? They burn to be speaking some words to you. Trust me, Beauchamp, if we shun to encounter the good warm soul of numbers, our hearts are narrowed to them. The business of our modern world is to open heart and stretch out arms to numbers. In numbers we have our sinews; they are our iron and gold. Scatter them not; teach them the secret of cohesion. Practically, since they gave you not their entire confidence once, you should not rebuff them to suspicions of you as aristocrat, when they rise on the effort to believe a man of, as 'tis called, birth their undivided friend. Meet them!'

'Send them,' said Beauchamp.

Jenny Denham fastened a vast cloak and a comforter

on the doctor's heedless shoulders and throat, enjoining on him to return in good time for dinner.

He put his finger to her cheek in reproof of such supererogatory counsel to a man famous for his punctuality.

The day had darkened.

Beauchamp begged Jenny to play to him on the piano.

'Do you indeed care to have music?' said she. 'I did not wish you to meet a deputation, because your strength is not yet equal to it. Dr. Shrapnel dwells on principles, forgetful of minor considerations.'

'I wish thousands did!' cried Beauchamp. 'When you play I seem to hear ideas. Your music makes me think.'

Jenny lit a pair of candles and set them on the piano. 'Waltzes?' she asked.

'Call in a puppet-show at once!'

She smiled, turned over some leaves, and struck the opening notes of the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven, and made her selections.

At the finish he said: 'Now read me your father's poem, "The Hunt of the Fates."'

She read it to him.

'Now read, "The Ascent from the Inferno."'

That she read: and also 'Soul and Brute,' another of his favourites.

He wanted more, and told her to read 'First Love—Last Love.'

'I fear I have not the tone of voice for love-poems,' Jenny said, returning the book to him.

'I 'll read it,' said he.

He read with more impressiveness than effect. Lydiard's reading thrilled her: Beauchamp's insisted too much on particular lines. But it was worth while observing him. She saw him always as in a picture, remote from herself. His loftier social station and strange

character precluded any of those keen suspicions by which women learn that a fire is beginning to glow near them.

'How I should like to have known your father!' he said. 'I don't wonder at Dr. Shrapnel's love of him. Yes, he was one of the great men of his day! and it 's a higher honour to be of his blood than any that rank can give. You were ten years old when you lost him. Describe him to me.'

'He used to play with me like a boy,' said Jenny. She described her father from a child's recollection of him.

'Dr. Shrapnel declares he would have been one of the first surgeons in Europe: and he was one of the first of poets,' Beauchamp pursued with enthusiasm. 'So he was doubly great. I hold a good surgeon to be in the front rank of public benefactors—where they put rich brewers, bankers, and speculative manufacturers now. Well! the world is young. We shall alter that in time. Whom did your father marry?'

Jenny answered, 'My mother was the daughter of a London lawyer. She married without her father's approval of the match, and he left her nothing.'

Beauchamp interjected: 'Lawyer's money!'

'It would have been useful to my mother's household when I was an infant,' said Jenny.

'Poor soul! I suppose so. Yes; well,' Beauchamp sighed. 'Money! never mind how it comes. We 're in such a primitive condition that we catch at anything to keep us out of the cold;—dogs with a bone!—instead of living, as Dr. Shrapnel prophecies, for and with one another. It 's war now, and money 's the weapon of war. And we 're the worst nation in Europe for that. But if we fairly recognize it, we shall be the first to alter our ways. There 's the point. Well, Jenny, I can look you in the face to-night. Thanks to my uncle Everard at last!'

'Captain Beauchamp, you have never been blamed.'

'I am Captain Beauchamp by courtesy, in public. My friends call me Nevil. I think I have heard the name on your lips?'

'When you were very ill.'

He stood closer to her, very close.

'Which was the arm that bled for me? May I look at it? There was a bruise.'

'Have you not forgotten that trifle? There is the faintest possible mark of it left.'

'I wish to see.'

She gently defended the arm, but he made it so much a matter of earnest to see the bruise of the old Election missile on her fair arm, that, with a pardonable soft blush, to avoid making much of it herself, she turned her sleeve a little above the wrist. He took her hand.

'It was for me!'

'It was quite an accident: no harm was intended.'

'But it was in my cause—for me!'

'Indeed, Captain Beauchamp . . .'

'Nevil, we say indoors.'

'Nevil—but is it not wiser to say what comes naturally to us?'

'Who told you to-day that you had brought me to life? I am here—to prove it true. If I had paid attention to your advice, I should not have gone into the cottage of those poor creatures and taken away the fever. I did no good there. But the man's wife said her husband had been ruined by voting for me: and it was a point of honour to go in and sit with him. You are not to have your hand back: it is mine. Don't you remember, Jenny, how you gave me your arm on the road when I staggered, two days before the fever knocked me over? Shall I tell you what I thought then? I thought that he who could have you for a mate would have the bravest and helpfullest wife in all England. And not a mere beauty, for

you have good looks: but you have the qualities I have been in search of. Why do your eyes look so mournfully at me? I am full of hope. We 'll sail the Esperanza for the Winter: you and I, and our best friend with us. And you shall have a voice in the council, be sure.'

'If you are two to one?' Jenny said quickly, to keep from faltering.

Beauchamp pressed his mouth to the mark of the bruise on her arm. He held her fast.

'I mean it, if you will join me, that you and I should rejoice the heart of the dear old man—will you? He has been brooding over your loneliness here if you are unmarried, ever since his recovery. I owe my life to you, and every debt of gratitude to him. Now, Jenny!'

'Oh! Captain Beauchamp—Nevil, if you will . . . if I may have my hand. You exaggerate common kindness. He loves you. We both esteem you.'

'But you don't love me?'

'Indeed I have no fear that I shall be unable to support myself, if I am left alone.'

'But I want your help. I wake from illness with my eyes open. I must have your arm to lean on now and then.'

Jenny dropped a shivering sigh.

'Uncle is long absent!' she said.

Her hand was released. Beauchamp inspected his watch.

'He may have fallen! He may be lying on the common!'

'Oh!' cried Jenny, 'why did I let him go out without me?'

'Let me have his lantern; I 'll go and search over the common.'

'You must not go out,' said she.

'I must. The old man may be perishing.'

'It will be death to you . . . Nevil!'

'That 's foolish. I can stand the air for a few minutes.'

'I 'll go,' said Jenny.

'Unprotected? No.'

'Cook shall come with me.'

'Two women!'

'Nevil, if you care a little for me, be good, be kind, submit.'

'He is half an hour behind dinner-time, and he 's never late. Something must have happened to him. Way for me, my dear girl.'

She stood firm between him and the door. It came to pass that she stretched her hands to arrest him, and he seized the hands.

'Rather than you should go out in this cold weather, anything!' she said, in the desperation of physical inability to hold him back.

'Ah!' Beauchamp crossed his arms round her. 'I 'll wait for five minutes.'

One went by, with Jenny folded, broken and sobbing, senseless, against his breast.

They had not heard Dr. Shrapnel quietly opening the hall door and hanging up his hat. He looked in.

'Beauchamp!' he exclaimed.

'Come, doctor,' said Beauchamp, and loosened his clasp of Jenny considerately.

She disengaged herself.

'Beauchamp! now I die a glad man.'

'Witness, doctor, she 's mine by her own confession.'

'Uncle!' Jenny gasped. 'Oh! Captain Beauchamp, what an error! what delusion! . . . Forget it. I will. Here are more misunderstandings! You shall be excused. But be . . .'

'Be you the blessedest woman alive on this earth, my Jenny!' shouted Dr. Shrapnel. 'You have the choice

man on all the earth for husband, sweetheart! Ay, of all the earth! I go with a message for my old friend Harry Denham, to quicken him in the grave; for the husband of his girl is Nevil Beauchamp! The one thing I dared not dream of thousands is established. Sunlight, my Jenny!'

Beauchamp kissed her hand.

She slipped away to her chamber, grovelling to find her diminished self somewhere in the mid-thunder of her amazement, as though it were to discover a pin on the floor by the flash of lightning. Where was she!

This ensued from the apology of Lord Romfrey to Dr. Shrapnel.

CHAPTER LV

WITHOUT LOVE

At the end of November, Jenny Denham wrote these lines to Mr. Lydiard, in reply to his request that she should furnish the latest particulars of Nevil Beauchamp, for the satisfaction of the Countess of Romfrey:—

'There is everything to reassure Lady Romfrey in the state of Captain Beauchamp's health, and I have never seen him so placidly happy as he has been since the arrival, yesterday morning, of a lady from France, Madame la Marquise de Rouaillout, with her brother, M. le Comte de Croisnel. Her husband, I hear from M. de Croisnel, dreads our climate and coffee too much to attempt the voyage. I understand that she writes to Lady Romfrey to-day. Lady Romfrey's letter to her, informing her of Captain Beauchamp's alarming illness, went the round from Normandy to Touraine and Dauphiny, otherwise she would have come over earlier.

'Her first inquiry of me was, "Il est mort?" You would have supposed her disappointed by my answer. A light went out in her eyes, like that of a veilleuse in the dawn. She looked at me without speaking, while her beautiful eyes regained their natural expression. She shut them and sighed. "Tell him that M. de Croisnel and his sister are here."

'This morning her wish to see Miss Halkett was gratified. You know my taste was formed in France; I agree with Captain Beauchamp in his more than admiration of Frenchwomen; ours, though more accomplished, are colder and less plastic. But Miss Halkett is surpassingly beautiful, very amiable, very generous, a perfect friend. She is our country at its best. Probably she is shy of speaking French; she frequently puts the Italian accent. Madame de Rouaillout begged to speak with her alone: I do not know what passed. Miss Halkett did not return to us.

'Dr. Shrapnel and Captain Beauchamp have recently been speculating on our becoming a nation of artists, and authorities in science and philosophy, by the time our coalfields and material wealth are exhausted. That, and the *cataclysm*, are their themes.

'They say, will things end utterly?—all our gains be lost? The question seems to me to come of that love of earth which is recognition of God: for if they cannot reconcile themselves to believe in extinction, to what must they be looking? It is a confirmation of your saying, that love leads to God, through art or in acts.

'You will regret to hear that the project of Captain Beauchamp's voyage is in danger of being abandoned. A committee of a vacant Radical borough has offered to nominate him. My influence is weak; madame would have him go back with her and her brother to Normandy. My influence is weak, I suppose, because he finds me

constantly leaning to expediency—I am your pupil. It may be quite correct that powder is intended for explosion: we do not therefore apply a spark to the barrel. I ventured on that. He pitied me in the snares of simile and metaphor. He is the same, you perceive. How often have we not discussed what would have become of him, with that "rocket brain" of his, in less quiet times! Yet, when he was addressing a deputation of workmen the other day, he recommended patience to them as one of the virtues that count under wisdom. He is curiously impatient for knowledge. One of his reasons for not accepting Colonel Halkett's offer of his yacht is, that he will not be able to have books enough on board. Definite instead of vast and hazy duties are to be desired for him, I think. Most fervently I pray that he will obtain a ship and serve some years. At the risk of your accusing me of "sententious posing," I would say, that men who do not live in the present chiefly, but hamper themselves with giant tasks in excess of alarm for the future, however devoted and noble they may be—and he is an example of one that is—reduce themselves to the dimensions of pigmies; they have the cry of infants. You reply, Foresight is an element of love of country and mankind. But how often is not the foresight guess-work?

'He has not spoken of the Dawn project. To-day he is repeating one of uncle's novelties—"Sultry Tories." The sultry Tory sits in the sun and prophecies woefully of storm, it appears. Your accusation that I am one at heart amuses me; I am not quite able to deny it. "Sultriness" I am not conscious of. But it would appear to be an epithet for the Conservatives of wealth. So that England, being very wealthy, we are to call it a sultry country? You are much wanted, for where there is no "middleman Liberal" to hold the scales for them, these two have it all their own way, which is not good for them.

Captain Beauchamp quotes you too. It seems that you once talked to him of a machine for measuring the force of blows delivered with the fist, and compared his efforts to those of one perpetually practising at it: and this you are said to have called—"The case of the Constitutional Realm and the extreme Radical." Elsewhere the Radical smites at iron or rotten wood; *in England it is a cushion on springs.* Did you say it? He quotes it as yours, half acquiescingly, and ruefully.

'For visitors, we have had Captain Baskelett for two minutes, and Lord Palmet, who stayed longer, and seems to intend to come daily. He attempts French with Madame de R., and amuses her a little: a silver foot and a ball of worsted. Mr. and Mrs. Grancey Lespel have called, and Lord and Lady Croyston. Colonel Halkett, Miss Halkett, and Mr. Tuckham come frequently. Captain Beauchamp spoke to her yesterday of her marriage.

'Madame de R. leaves us to-morrow. Her brother is a delightful, gay-tempered, very handsome boyish Frenchman—not her equal, to my mind, for I do not think Frenchmen comparable to the women of France; but she is exceedingly grave, with hardly a smile, and his high spirits excite Nevil's, so it is pleasant to see them together.'

The letter was handed to Lady Romfrey. She read through it thoughtfully till she came to the name of Nevil, when she frowned. On the morrow she pronounced it a disingenuous letter. Renée had sent her these lines:—

'I should come to you if my time were not restricted; my brother's leave of absence is short. I have done here what lay in my power, to show you I have learnt something in the school of self-immolation. I have seen Mlle. Halkett. She is a beautiful young woman, deficient only in words, doubtless. My labour, except that it may

satisfy you, was the vainest of tasks. She marries a ruddy monsieur of a name that I forget, and of the bearing of a member of the gardes du corps, without the stature. Enfin, madame, I have done my duty, and do not regret it, since I may hope that it will win for me some approbation and a portion of the esteem of a lady to whom I am indebted for that which is now the best of life to me: and I do not undervalue it in saying I would gladly have it stamped on brass and deposited beside my father's. I have my faith. I would it were Nevil's too—and yours, should you be in need of it.

'He will marry Mlle. Denham. If I may foretell events, she will steady him. She is a young person who will not feel astray in society of his rank; she possesses the natural grace we do not expect to see out of our country —from sheer ignorance of what is beyond it. For the moment she affects to consider herself unworthy; and it is excuseable that she should be slightly alarmed at her prospect. But Nevil must have a wife. I presume to think that he could not have chosen better. Above all, make him leave England for the Winter. Adieu, dear countess. Nevil promises me a visit after his marriage. I shall not set foot on England again: but you, should you ever come to our land of France, will find my heart open to you at the gates of undying grateful recollection. I am not skilled in writing. You have looked into me once; look now; I am the same. Only I have succeeded in bringing myself to a greater likeness to the dead, as it becomes a creature to be who is coupled with one of their body. Meanwhile I shall have news of you. I trust that soon I may be warranted in forwarding congratulations to Lord Romfrey.'

Rosamund handed the letters to her husband. Not only did she think Miss Denham disingenuous, she saw

that the girl was not in love with Beauchamp: and the idea of a loveless marriage for him threw the mournfullest of Hecate's beams along the course of a career that the passionate love of a bride, though she were not well-born and not wealthy, would have rosily coloured.

'Without love!' she exclaimed to herself. She asked the earl's opinion of the startling intelligence, and of the character of that Miss Denham, who could pen such a letter, after engaging to give her hand to Nevil.

Lord Romfrey laughed in his dumb way. 'If Nevil must have a wife—and the marquise tells you so, and she ought to know—he may as well marry a girl who won't go all the way down hill with him at his pace. He 'll be cogged.'

'You do not object to such an alliance?'

'I 'm past objection. There 's no law against a man's marrying his nurse.'

'But she is not even in love with him!'

'I dare say not. He wants a wife: she accepts a husband. The two women who were in love with him he wouldn't have.'

Lady Romfrey sighed deeply: 'He has lost Cecilia! She might still have been his: but he has taken to that girl. And Madame de Rouaillout praises the girl because —oh! I see it—she has less to be jealous of in Miss Denham: of whose birth and blood we know nothing. Let that pass! If only she loved him! I cannot endure the thought of his marrying a girl who is not in love with him.'

'Just as you like, my dear.'

'I used to suspect Mr. Lydiard.'

'Perhaps he 's the man.'

'Oh, what an end of so brilliant a beginning!'

'It strikes me, my dear,' said the earl, 'it 's the proper common sense beginning that may have a fairish end.'

'No, but what I feel is that he—our Nevil!—has accomplished hardly anything, if anything!'

'He hasn't marched on London with a couple of hundred thousand men: no, he hasn't done that,' the earl said, glancing back in his mind through Beauchamp's career. 'And he escapes what Stukely calls his nation's scourge, in the shape of a statue turned out by an English chisel. No: we haven't had much public excitement out of him. But one thing he did do: *he got me down on my knees!*'

Lord Romfrey pronounced these words with a sober emphasis that struck the humour of it sharply into Rosamund's heart, through some contrast it presented between Nevil's aim at the world and hit of a man: the immense deal thought of it by the earl, and the very little that Nevil would think of it—the great domestic achievement to be boasted of by an enthusiastic devotee of politics!

She embraced her husband with peals of loving laughter: the last laughter heard in Romfrey Castle for many a day.

CHAPTER LVI

THE LAST OF NEVIL BEAUCHAMP

Not before Beauchamp was flying with the Winter gales to warmer climes could Rosamund reflect on his career unshadowed by her feminine mortification at the thought that he was unloved by the girl he had decided to marry. But when he was away and winds blew, the clouds which obscured an embracing imagination of him—such as, to be true and full and sufficient, should stretch like the dome of heaven over the humblest of lives under contemplation—broke, and revealed him to her as one who

had other than failed: rather as one in mid career, in mid forest, who, by force of character, advancing in self-conquest, strikes his impress right and left around him, because of his aim at stars. He had faults, and she gloried to think he had; for the woman's heart rejoiced in his portion of our common humanity while she named their prince to men: but where was he to be matched in devotedness and in gallantry? and what man of blood fiery as Nevil's ever fought so to subject it? Rosamund followed him like a migratory bird, hovered over his vessel, perched on deck beside the helm, where her sailor was sure to be stationed, entered his breast, communed with him, and wound him round and round with her love. He has mine! she cried. Her craving that he should be blest in the reward, or flower-crown, of his wife's love of him lessened in proportion as her brooding spirit vividly realized his deeds. In fact it had been but an example of our very general craving for a climax, palpable and scenic. She was completely satisfied by her conviction that his wife would respect and must be subordinate to him. So it had been with her. As for love, let him come to his Rosamund for love, and appreciation, adoration!

Rosamund drew nigh to her hour of peril with this torch of her love of Beauchamp to illuminate her.

There had been a difficulty in getting him to go. One day Cecilia walked down to Dr. Shrapnel's with Mr. Tuckham, to communicate that the Esperanza awaited Captain Beauchamp, manned and provisioned, off the pier. Now, he would not go without Dr. Shrapnel, nor the doctor without Jenny; and Jenny could not hold back, seeing that the wish of her heart was for Nevil to be at sea, untroubled by political questions and prowling Radical deputies. So her consent was the seal of the voyage. What she would not consent to, was the

proposal to have her finger ringed previous to the voyage, altogether in the manner of a sailor's bride. She seemed to stipulate for a term of courtship. Nevil frankly told the doctor that he was not equal to it; anything that was kind he was quite ready to say; and anything that was pretty: but nothing particularly kind and pretty occurred to him: he was exactly like a juvenile correspondent facing a blank sheet of letter paper:—he really did not know what to say, further than the uncomplicated exposition of his case, that he wanted a wife and had found the very woman. How, then, fathom Jenny's mood for delaying? Dr. Shrapnel's exhortations were so worded as to induce her to comport herself like a Scriptural woman, humbly wakeful to the surpassing splendour of the high fortune which had befallen her in being so selected, and obedient at a sign. But she was, it appeared that she was, a maid of scaly vision, not perceptive of the blessedness of her lot. She could have been very little perceptive, for she did not understand his casual allusion to Beauchamp's readiness to overcome 'a natural repugnance,' for the purpose of making her his wife.

Up to the last moment, before Cecilia Halkett left the deck of the Esperanza to step on the pier, Jenny remained in vague but excited expectation of something intervening to bring Cecilia and Beauchamp together. It was not a hope; it was with pure suspense that she awaited the issue. Cecilia was pale. Beauchamp shook Mr. Tuckham by the hand, and said: 'I shall not hear the bells, but send me word of it, will you?' and he wished them both all happiness.

The sails of the schooner filled. On a fair frosty day, with a light wind ruffling from the North-west, she swept away, out of sight of Bevisham, and the island, into the Channel, to within view of the coast of France. England

once below the water-line, alone with Beauchamp and Dr. Shrapnel, Jenny Denham knew her fate.

As soon as that grew distinctly visible in shape and colour, she ceased to be reluctant. All about her, in air and sea and unknown coast, was fresh and prompting. And if she looked on Beauchamp, the thought—my husband! palpitated, and destroyed and re-made her. Rapidly she underwent her transformation from doubtfully-minded woman to woman awakening clear-eyed, and with new sweet shivers in her temperate blood, like the tremulous light seen running to the morn upon a quiet sea. She fell under the charm of Beauchamp at sea.

In view of the island of Madeira, Jenny noticed that some trouble had come upon Dr. Shrapnel and Beauchamp, both of whom had been hilarious during the gales; but sailing into Summer they began to wear that look which indicated one of their serious deliberations. She was not taken into their confidence, and after a while they recovered partially.

The truth was, they had been forced back upon old English ground by a recognition of the absolute necessity, for her sake, of handing themselves over to a parson. In England, possibly, a civil marriage might have been proposed to the poor girl. In a foreign island, they would be driven not simply to accept the services of a parson, but to seek him and solicit him: otherwise the knot, faster than any sailor's in binding, could not be tied. Decidedly it could not; and how submit? Neither Dr. Shrapnel nor Beauchamp were of a temper to deceive the clerical gentleman; only they had to think of Jenny's feelings. Alas for us!—this our awful baggage in the rear of humanity, these women who have not moved on their own feet one step since the primal mother taught them to suckle, are perpetually pulling

us backward on the march. Slaves of custom, forms, shows and superstitions, they are slaves of the priests. 'They are so in gratitude perchance, as the matter works,' Dr. Shrapnel admitted. For at one period the priests did cherish and protect the weak from animal man. But we have entered a broader daylight now, when the sun of high heaven has crowned our structure with the flower of brain, like him to scatter mists, and penetrate darkness, and shoot from end to end of earth; and must we still be grinning subserviently to ancient usages and stale forms, because of a baggage that it is, woe to us! too true, we cannot cut ourselves loose from? Lydiard might say we are compelling the priests to fight, and that they are compact foemen, not always passive. Battle, then!—The cry was valiant. Nevertheless, Jenny would certainly insist upon the presence of a parson, in spite of her bridegroom's 'natural repugnance.' Dr. Shrapnel offered to argue it with her, being of opinion that a British consul could satisfactorily perform the ceremony. Beauchamp knew her too well. Moreover, though tongue-tied as to love-making, he was in a hurry to be married. Jenny's eyes were lovely, her smiles were soft; the fair promise of her was in bloom on her face and figure. He could not wait; he must off to the parson.

Then came the question as to whether honesty and honour did not impose it on them to deal openly with that gentle, and on such occasions unobtrusive official, by means of a candid statement to him overnight, to the effect that they were the avowed antagonists of his Church, which would put him on his defence, and lead to an argument that would accomplish his overthrow.—You parsons, whose cause is good, marshal out the poor of the land, that we may see the sort of army your stewardship has gained for you. What! no army? only women and hoary men? And in the rear rank, to support you

as an institution, none but fanatics, cowards, white-eyeballed dogmatists, timeservers, money-changers, mockers in their sleeves? What is this?

But the prospect of so completely confounding the unfortunate parson warned Beauchamp that he might have a shot in his locker: the parson heavily trodden on will turn. 'I suppose we must be hypocrites,' he said in dejection. Dr. Shrapnel was even more melancholy. He again offered to try his persuasiveness upon Jenny. Beauchamp declined to let her be disturbed.

She did not yield so very lightly to the invitation to go before a parson. She had to be wooed after all; a Harry Hotspur's wooing. Three clergymen of the Established Church were on the island: 'And where won't they be, where there's fine scenery and comforts abound?' Beauchamp said to the doctor ungratefully.

'Whether a celibate clergy ruins the Faith faster than a non-celibate, I won't dispute,' replied the doctor; 'but a non-celibate interwinds with us, and is likely to keep up a one-storied edifice longer.'

Jenny hesitated. She was a faltering unit against an ardent and imperative two in the council. And Beauchamp had shown her a letter of Lady Romfrey's very clearly signifying that she and her lord anticipated tidings of the union. Marrying Beauchamp was no simple adventure. She feared in her bosom, and resigned herself.

She had a taste of what it was to be, at the conclusion of the service. Beauchamp thanked the good-natured clergyman, and spoke approvingly of him to his bride, as an agreeable well-bred gentlemanly person. Then, fronting her and taking both her hands: 'Now, my darling,' he said: 'you must pledge me your word to this: I have stooped my head to the parson, and I am content to have done that to win you, though I don't think much of

myself for doing it. I can't look so happy as I am. And this idle ceremony—however, I thank God I have you, and I thank you for tâking me. But you won't expect me to give in to the parson again.'

'But, Nevil,' she said, fearing what was to come: 'they are gentlemen, good men.'

'Yes, yes.'

'They are educated men, Nevil.'

'Jenny! Jenny Beauchamp, they 're not men, they 're Churchmen. My experience of the priest in our country is, that he has abandoned—he 's dead against the only cause that can justify and keep up a Church: the cause of the poor—the people. He is a creature of the moneyed class. I look on him as a pretender. I go through his forms, to save my wife from annoyance, but there 's the end of it: and if ever I 'm helpless, unable to resist him, I rely on your word not to let him intrude; he 's to have nothing to do with the burial of me. He's against the cause of the people. Very well: I make my protest to the death against him. When he 's a Christian instead of a Churchman, then may my example not be followed. It 's little use looking for that.'

Jenny dropped some tears on her bridal day. She sighed her submission. 'So long as you do not change,' said she.

'Change!' cried Nevil. 'That 's for the parson. Now it 's over: we start fair. My darling! I have you. I don't mean to bother you. I 'm sure you 'll see that the enemies of Reason are the enemies of the human race; you will see that. I can wait.'

'If we can be sure that we ourselves are using reason rightly, Nevil!—not prejudice.'

'Of course. But don't you see, my Jenny, *we* have no interest in opposing reason?'

'But have we not all grown up together? And is it

just or wise to direct our efforts to overthrow a solid structure that is a part . . .?'

He put his legal right in force to shut her mouth, telling her presently she might *Lydiardize* as much as she liked. While practising this mastery, he assured her he would always listen to her: yes, whether she Lydiardized, or what Dr. Shrapnel called Jennyprated.

'That is to say, dear Nevil, that you have quite made up your mind to a toddling chattering little nursery wife?'

Very much the contrary to anything of the sort, he declared; and he proved his honesty by announcing an immediate reflection that had come to him: 'How oddly things are settled! Cecilia Halkett and Tuckham; you and I! Now, I know for certain that I have brought Cecilia Halkett out of her woman's Toryism, and given her at least liberal views, and she goes and marries an arrant Tory; while you, a bit of a Tory at heart, more than anything else, have married an ultra.'

'Perhaps we may hope that the conflict will be seasonable on both sides?—if you give me fair play, Nevil!'

As fair play as a woman's lord could give her, she was to have; with which, adieu to argumentation and controversy, and all the thanks in life to the parson! On a lovely island, free from the seductions of care, possessing a wife who, instead of starting out of romance and poetry with him to the supreme honeymoon, led him back to those forsaken valleys of his youth, and taught him the joys of colour and sweet companionship, simple delights, a sister mind, with a loveliness of person and nature unimagined by him, Beauchamp drank of a happiness that neither Renée nor Cecilia had promised. His wooing of Jenny Beauchamp was a flattery richer than any the maiden Jenny Denham could have deemed her due; and if his wonder in experiencing such strange gladness was

quaintly ingènuous, it was delicious to her to see and know full surely that he who was at little pains to court, or please, independently of the agency of the truth in him, had come to be her lover through being her husband.

Here I would stop. It is Beauchamp's career that carries me on to its close, where the lanterns throw their beams off the mudbanks by the black riverside; when some few English men and women differed from the world in thinking that it had suffered a loss.

They sorrowed for the earl when tidings came to them of the loss of his child, alive one hour in his arms. Rosamund caused them to be deceived as to her condition. She survived; she wrote to Jenny, bidding her keep her husband cruising. Lord Romfrey added a brief word: he told Nevil that he would see no one for the present; hoped he would be absent a year, not a day less. To render it the more easily practicable, in the next packet of letters Colonel Halkett and Cecilia begged them not to bring the Esperanza home for the yachting season: the colonel said his daughter was to be married in April, and that bridegroom and bride had consented to take an old man off with them to Italy; perhaps in the autumn all might meet in Venice.

'And you 've never seen Venice,' Beauchamp said to Jenny.

'Everything is new to me,' said she, penetrating and gladly joining the conspiracy to have him out of England.

Dr. Shrapnel was not so compliant as the young husband. Where he could land and botanize, as at Madeira, he let time fly and drum his wings on air, but the cities of priests along the coast of Portugal and Spain roused him to a burning sense of that flight of time and the vacuity it told of in his labours. Greatly to his

astonishment, he found that it was no longer he and Beauchamp against Jenny, but Jenny and Beauchamp against him.

'What!' he cried, 'to draw breath day by day, and not to pay for it by striking daily at the rock Iniquity? Are you for that, Beauchamp? And in a land where these priests walk with hats curled like the water-lily's leaf without the flower? How far will you push indolent unreason to gain the delusion of happiness? There is no such thing: but there 's trance. That talk of happiness is a carrion clamour of the creatures of prey. Take it—and you 're helping tear some poor wretch to pieces, whom you might be constructing, saving perchance: some one? some thousands! You, Beauchamp, when I met you first, you were for England, England! for a breadth of the palm of my hand comparatively—the round of a copper penny, no wider! And from that you jumped at a bound to the round of this earth: you were for humanity. Ay, we sailed our planet among the icy spheres, and were at blood-heat for its destiny, you and I! And now you hover for a wind to catch you. So it is for a soul rejecting prayer. This wind and that has it: the wellsprings within are shut down fast! I pardon my Jenny, my Harry Denham's girl. She is a woman, and has a brain like a bell that rings all round to the tongue. It is her kingdom, of the interdicted untraversed frontiers. But what cares she, or any woman, that this Age of ours should lie like a carcase against the Sun? What cares any woman to help to hold up Life to him? He breeds divinely upon life, filthy upon stagnation. Sail you away, if you will, in your trance. I go. I go home by land alone, and I await you. Here in this land of moles upright, I do naught but execrate; I am a pulpit of curses. Counter-anathema, you might call me.'

'Oh! I feel the comparison so, for England shining

spiritually bright,' said Jenny, and cut her husband adrift with the exclamation, and saw him float away to Dr. Shrapnel.

'*Spiritually* bright!'

'By comparison, Nevil.'

'There 's neither spiritual nor political brightness in England, but a common resolution to eat of good things and stick to them,' said the doctor: 'and we two out of England, there 's barely a voice to cry scare to the feeders. I 'm back! I 'm home!'

They lost him once in Cadiz, and discovered him on the quay, looking about for a vessel. In getting him to return to the Esperanza, they nearly all three fell into the hands of the police. Beauchamp gave him a great deal of his time, reading and discussing with him on deck and in the cabin, and projecting future enterprises, to pacify his restlessness. A translation of Plato had become Beauchamp's intellectual world. This philosopher singularly anticipated his ideas. Concerning himself he was beginning to think that he had many years ahead of him for work. He was with Dr. Shrapnel, as to the battle, and with Jenny as to the delay in recommencing it. Both the men laughed at the constant employment she gave them among the Greek islands in furnishing her severely accurate accounts of sea-fights and land-fights: and the scenes being before them they could neither of them protest that their task-work was an idle labour. Dr. Shrapnel assisted in fighting Marathon and Salamis over again cordially—to shield Great Britain from the rule of a satrapy.

Beauchamp often tried to conjure words to paint his wife. On grave subjects she had the manner of speaking of a shy scholar, and between grave and playful, between smiling and serious, her clear head, her nobly poised character, seemed to him to have never had a prototype

and to elude the art of picturing it in expression, until he heard Lydiard call her whimsically, 'Portia disrobing': Portia half in her doctor's gown, half out of it. They met Lydiard and his wife Louise, and Mr. and Mrs. Tuckham, in Venice, where, upon the first day of October, Jenny Beauchamp gave birth to a son. The thrilling mother did not perceive on this occasion the gloom she cast over the father of the child and Dr. Shrapnel. The youngster would insist on his right to be sprinkled by the parson, to get a legal name and please his mother. At all turns in the history of our healthy relations with women we are confronted by the parson! 'And, upon my word, I believe,' Beauchamp said to Lydiard, 'those parsons—not bad creatures in private life: there was one in Madeira I took a personal liking to—but they 're utterly ignorant of what men feel to them—more ignorant than women!' Mr. Tuckham and Mrs. Lydiard would not listen to his foolish objections; nor were they ever mentioned to Jenny. Apparently the commission of the act of marriage was to force Beauchamp from all his positions one by one.

'The education of that child?' Mrs. Lydiard said to her husband.

He considered that the mother would prevail.

Cecilia feared she would not.

'Depend upon it, he 'll make himself miserable if he can,' said Tuckham.

That gentleman, however, was perpetually coming fuming from arguments with Beauchamp, and his opinion was a controversialist's. His common sense was much afflicted. 'I thought marriage would have stopped all those absurdities,' he said, glaring angrily, laughing, and then frowning. 'I 've warned him I 'll go out of my way to come across him if he carries on his headlong folly. A man should accept his country for what it is when he 's

born into it. Don't tell me he 's a good fellow. I know he is, but there 's an ass mounted on the good fellow. Talks of the parsons! Why, they 're men of education.'

'They couldn't steer a ship in a gale, though.'

'Oh! he 's a good sailor. And let him go to sea,' said Tuckham. 'His wife 's a prize. He 's hardly worthy of her. If she manages him she 'll deserve a monument for doing a public service.'

How fortunate it is for us that here and there we do not succeed in wresting our temporary treasure from the grasp of the Fates!

This good old commonplace reflection came to Beauchamp while clasping his wife's hand on the deck of the Esperanza, and looking up at the mountains over the Gulf of Venice. The impression of that marvellous dawn when he and Renée looked up hand-in-hand was ineffaceable, and pity for the tender hand lost to him wrought in his blood, but Jenny was a peerless wife; and though not in the music of her tongue, or in subtlety of delicate meaning did she excel Renée, as a sober adviser she did, and as a firm speaker; and she had homelier deep eyes, thoughtfuller brows. The father could speculate with good hope of Jenny's child. Cecilia's wealth, too, had gone over to the Tory party, with her incomprehensible espousal of Tuckham. Let it go; let all go for dowerless Jenny!

It was (she dared to recollect it in her anguish) Jenny's choice to go home in the yacht that decided her husband not to make the journey by land in company with the Lydiards.

The voyage was favourable. Beauchamp had a passing wish to land on the Norman coast, and take Jenny

for a day to Tourdestelle. He deferred to her desire to land baby speedily, now they were so near home. They ran past Otley river, having sight of Mount Laurels, and on to Bevisham, with swelling sails. There they parted. Beauchamp made it one of his 'points of honour' to deliver the vessel where he had taken her, at her moorings in the Otley. One of the piermen stood before Beauchamp, and saluting him, said he had been directed to inform him that the Earl of Romfrey was with Colonel Halkett, expecting him at Mount Laurels. Beauchamp wanted his wife to return in the yacht. She turned her eyes to Dr. Shrapnel. It was out of the question that the doctor should think of going. Husband and wife parted. She saw him no more.

This is no time to tell of weeping. The dry chronicle is fittest. Hard on nine o'clock in the December darkness, the night being still and clear, Jenny's babe was at her breast, and her ears were awake for the return of her husband. A man rang at the door of the house, and asked to see Dr. Shrapnel. This man was Killick, the Radical Sam of politics. He said to the doctor: 'I 'm going to hit you sharp, sir; I 've had it myself: please put on your hat and come out with me; and close the door. They mustn't hear inside. And here 's a fly. I knew you 'd be off for the finding of the body. Commander Beauchamp 's drowned.'

Dr. Shrapnel drove round by the shore of the broad water past a great hospital and ruined abbey to Otley village. Killick had lifted him into the conveyance, and he lifted him out. Dr. Shrapnel had not spoken a word. Lights were flaring on the river, illuminating the small craft sombrely. Men, women, and children crowded the hard and landing-places, the marshy banks and the decks of colliers and trawlers. Neither Killick nor Dr. Shrapnel questioned them. The lights were torches and lanterns;

the occupation of the boats moving in couples was the dragging for the dead.

'O God, let 's find his body,' a woman called out.

'Just a word; is it Commander Beauchamp?' Killick said to her.

She was scarcely aware of a question. 'Here, this one,' she said, and plucked a little boy of eight by the hand close against her side, and shook him roughly and kissed him.

An old man volunteered information. 'That 's the boy. That boy was in his father's boat out there, with two of his brothers, larking; and he and another older than him fell overboard; and just then Commander Beauchamp was rowing by, and I saw him from off here, where I stood, jump up and dive, and he swam to his boat with one of them, and got him in safe: that boy: and he dived again after the other, and was down a long time. Either he burst a vessel or he got cramp, for he 'd been rowing himself from the schooner grounded down at the river-mouth, and must have been hot when he jumped in: either way, he fetched the second up, and sank with him. Down he went.'

A fisherman said to Killick: 'Do you hear that voice thundering? That 's the great Lord Romfrey. He 's been directing the dragging since five o' the evening, and will till he drops or drowns, or up comes the body.'

'O God, let 's find the body!' the woman with the little boy called out.

A torch lit up Lord Romfrey's face as he stepped ashore. 'The flood has played us a trick,' he said. 'We want more drags, or with the next ebb the body may be lost for days in this infernal water.'

The mother of the rescued boy sobbed, 'Oh, my lord, my lord!'

The earl caught sight of Dr. Shrapnel, and went to him.

'My wife has gone down to Mrs. Beauchamp,' he said. 'She will bring her and the baby to Mount Laurels. The child will have to be hand-fed. I take you with me. You must not be alone.'

He put his arm within the arm of the heavily-breathing man whom he had once flung to the ground, to support him.

'My lord! my lord!' sobbed the woman, and dropped on her knees.

'What 's this?' the earl said, drawing his hand away from the woman's clutch at it.

'She 's the mother, my lord,' several explained to him.

'Mother of what?'

'My boy,' the woman cried, and dragged the urchin to Lord Romfrey's feet, cleaning her boy's face with her apron.

'It 's the boy Commander Beauchamp drowned to save,' said a man.

All the lights of the ring were turned on the head of the boy. Dr. Shrapnel's eyes and Lord Romfrey's fell on the abashed little creature. The boy struck out both arms to get his fists against his eyelids.

This is what we have in exchange for Beauchamp!

It was not uttered, but it was visible in the blank stare at one another of the two men who loved Beauchamp, after they had examined the insignificant bit of mudbank life remaining in this world in the place of him.

THE END

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